TAYLOR

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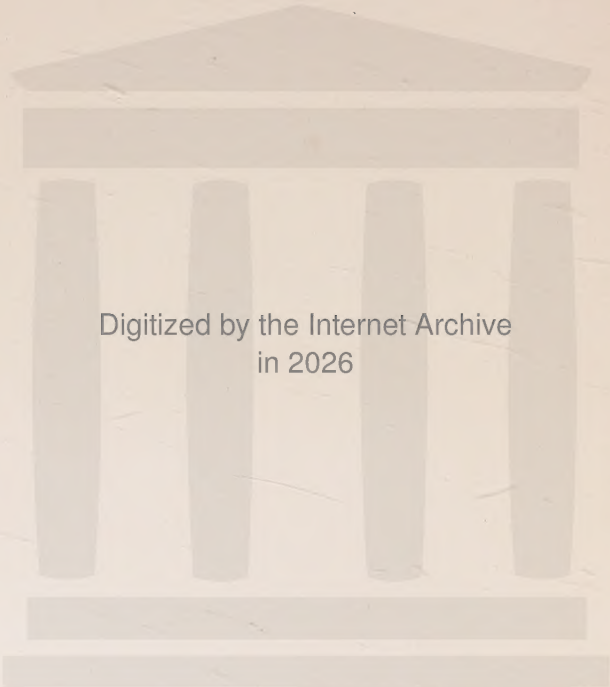
Poetry- American

Lou S. Foster

January 17, 1913.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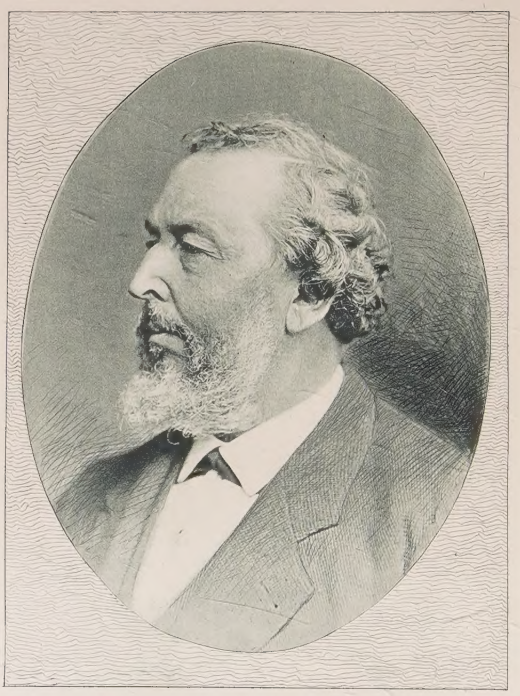

Bayard Taylor

THE POETICAL WORKS OF BAYARD TAYLOR

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

[illegible]

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge.

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PREFACE BY THE EDITOR

When it devolved upon me, in 1879, to prepare the collected poems of Bayard Taylor for the Household Edition of the following year, I was so fortunate as to have, as an expression of the poet's wishes in regard to the earlier productions, his own copy of the Blue and Gold Edition, published in 1865 by Ticknor and Fields. In that volume, after careful and severe sifting of his various publications from 1848 to 1863, Taylor had brought together all the poems which he wished to retain in his "complete" poetical works.

During the latter years of his life, however, his perfected judgment told him that in 1865, when he struck out from the Blue and Gold Edition nineteen of the poems contained in the two volumes, — "Poems of the Orient" (1854), "Poems of Home and Travel" (1855), — he had not been sufficiently critical. Consequently, to satisfy his poetic conscience, he marked, in his own Blue and Gold copy, a number of poems to be excluded from the new collective edition to which he was looking forward. Abridging the table of contents, he wrote at its foot: "Including the three songs in 'the Poet's Journal,' there are here 172 poems covering a period of twenty years. In addition I have written, but omitted, 125 others, some of which have never been published. There are yet twenty or thirty which might well be spared from this collection." At a still later date the number of poems thus marked for omission had risen to forty. Aside from these (one of which he himself reinstated) were two songs, "Gulistan," and "A Pledge to Hafiz," in regard to which he was uncertain; as he had merely marked them as doubtful, I have given them the benefit of the doubt, and in the present edition left them in their accustomed places.

In preparing the Household Edition of 1880, it was no easy task to deal with the poems, either not collected in the volume of 1875, or written after its publication and still in manuscript. To make amends, if at that time I did not reject all the poetical productions Taylor would have rejected, I have eliminated from the present work, after mature reflection, a few of the poems which appeared in the former Household Edition. On the other hand, there is included an additional poem which at last has found its rightful place, and is printed for the first time with his collected verse. When preparing the former edition, I was not at liberty to include this "Centennial Hymn," owing to facts apparent in the correspondence between the two poets (published by Mr. Samuel T. Pickard) and Taylor's remark to me, that so long as Whittier lived, his own Hymn to the Republic should not come to light. In 1892 this restriction was removed by Whittier's death, and two years later the hymn, together with its history, appeared in Pickard's "Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier" (pp. 616–620).

The suggestion of arranging the poems of the present edition so far in

chronological order as would not alter materially the author's own grouping came to me from his expressed belief, that to understand the nature of a poet, and to see him in his true individuality, one must study him in the development of his work. This fits Taylor's case as well as that of any other. In following the flight of his imagination, as presented in his poetry, through a space of over thirty years, we catch sight of his growth at its various stages, and of the influences by which that growth was governed. Song, with him, became enduring when, after crossing the Atlantic for the first time, he was stimulated by old world impressions. Contact with the picturesque in nature and in history, the revelations to him in the art of Italy, his study of German poetry, all combined to inspire him with more than passing images and conceptions. But to bear true fruitage he had first to return to his native soil. Here he shortly afterwards met his life-long friend, Richard Henry Stoddard, who was equally enthusiastic that they should become "sacrificers at the altar of Divinest Poesy" (letter of Taylor to George H. Boker). At their nightly symposia in Taylor's New York attic, these aspiring devotees at the shrine of poetry spurred and stimulated each other, and vied in imaginative production. Years later, in a sonnet to Stoddard, Taylor referred to that Arcadian time

> "When first we twain the pleasant land of Rhyme
> Discovered, choosing side by side our seats
> Below our separate Gods: in midnight streets,
> In haunted attics flattered by the chime
> Of silver words, and, fed by faith sublime,
> I Shelley's mantle wore, you that of Keats."

His fanciful conceit that Shelley's spiritual influence had entered his own mind seems pardonable in one who, even before his acquaintance with the works of that poet, had voiced in his "Angel of the Soul" the same passionate appeal for the solution of life's mystery that Shelley had expressed in the introductory passage of his "Alastor." But while at even this early period his study of Shelley inspired him, and moved him to such songs as "The Ode to Shelley" and "Ariel in the Cloven Pine," it is but fair to point to another master-singer who might be said to have had, if not an equal, at the least a partial, influence on his lyrical expression. While in Germany he read, for the first time in the original, Schiller's poems. Appealing to his ear with their rhythmical beauty, they stirred his imagination, and through those early years of struggle for a "poetical individuality," as he himself termed it in letters of that time, there is in his verse the same exuberance of diction, the same fervor and passionate chase after the ideal, as is to be found in Schiller's "Poems of the First Period."

This individuality asserted itself in a decided fashion when he produced his first three California ballads, — poems which were written before he had visited that part of the continent. When they appeared anonymously in "The Literary World," thoroughly characteristic though they were, no one so much as guessed their origin. In "Kubleh," also, an idyl in which chords were struck destined to swing into wider vibrations, we see the steadily ascending range of his poetic art. Although "Kubleh" was his earliest pastoral of the East, it was not included in his collection of Oriental Poems, but has kept its

place among his Romances and Lyrics. "Hylas," a poem the beauty of which his critics were unable to see, and for which they gave him cold praise, was the crowning achievement of that period, — yet, although it was pure in form as the limbs of a Greek statue, and in tone limpid and clear as the waters of the Scamander, at the first breath of adverse criticism Taylor was abashed, and for the moment doubted his own ability to handle a classic theme. At the time of this latter poem he was passing through experiences of love and sorrow, and poetical expression was alternately "a solace and an impossibility"; but by degrees, energy of life and creative impulse reasserted themselves until as never before he became possessed of the spirit of song.

Life in the open air, contact with the elemental forces of nature, had always dominated him. Although poetry was his one luminary, he wanted to live poetry as well as to write it. Travel, new and fresh experiences, were a necessity to his nature. When he turned to the East, he was prompted by an instinct that seldom failed to lead him aright. Travelling as far as Nubia, —

"A land of dreams and sleep — a poppied land!"

and beyond, "buried in the heat, the silence and the mystery of mid-Africa," he found the peace and repose which were needed to make his mind once more receptive to poetical conceptions. But it was not until he approached the shores of the farther East that the mood seized him to put into visible form the songs within his brain. While in India, in China, and "off Japan," such poems as "Camadeva" and "Daughter of Egypt, veil thine eyes," came into existence. But the most fruitful days were those of the voyage home, when song after song was written, to the long swell of the Atlantic and the free sweep of ocean winds. Yet although "The Bedouin's Song," "Nubia," "Tyre," and "Amram's Wooing" were but a few of the many that bore the date of the return, even then the rich lyrical store he had acquired during his journeyings through the East was not exhausted. In the extended springtime of productiveness, he wrote the "Song of the Camp," a poem which, with "The Bedouin's Song," "Daughter of Egypt," "The Quaker Widow," and others, has enjoyed to the present day an undiminished popularity.

After such an abounding lyrical harvest, it was not strange that, for a time, poetry should be "dead and buried" (letter to Boker). Taylor was, in fact, as he wrote to his publisher, passing from one phase into another, and he wanted to slough the old skin completely before appearing in the new. This state of transition was natural. Worshipper hitherto at the shrine of Nature, the truth gradually dawned on him that Man was more than she. A poem, written in 1856 (judging from existing fragments in manuscript) takes us directly into his confidence: —

"I gave to Nature more than she gave back;
The dreams that, vanished once, return no more;
Passions that left her colder than before,
And the warm soul her stubborn features lack.
It was an echo of my heart I heard
Sing in the sky, and chant along the sea;
My life the affluence of her own conferred,
And gave her seeming sympathy with me.
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

"The voices which encouraged me are dumb.
The soul I recognized in Earth is fled.
I wait for answers which have ceased to come.
I press the pulse of Nature ; she is dead.
. . . . . .
"O, not to know, the sunny mist that gilds
The mountain tops, my breath has thither blown!
O, not to feel that loftiest Beauty builds
In Man her Temple, and in Man alone!
. . . . . .
"Love, passion, rapture, terror, grief, repose,
Through him alone the face of Nature knows ;
There is no aspect of the changing zones
But springs from something deeper in the heart ;
Then, let me touch its chords with tender art,
And cease to chant in wind-harp monotones."

This composition was entitled "Renunciation." It was rewritten and published in 1859, and appeared for the last time in the collective edition of 1865.

Several years passed before the poetic mood again seized him, and "The Return of the Goddess" ushered in that "freshet of song" which culminated in "The Poet's Journal." In a measure "The Poet's Journal" is a retrospect of Taylor's inner life, — his love, sorrow, despair, and final recovery ; but in a measure only. That he shrank from giving to the public his inmost experiences and feelings was well known to his friends. It may be owing to this that lyrics like "On the Headland" and "Young Love" had for seven years been locked in his portfolio, when at last they appeared in "The Poet's Journal."

The din of civil rebellion and the tumult of war were not propitious to Art. During the apathy of the country toward imaginative literature, there rose up before Taylor, claiming his long postponed devotion, a conception which for years had lingered in his mind. Despite many hindrances and the fact that his work for the most part had to be done at night, his composition "The Picture of St. John," to its very last stanza, had "precedence over all other guests of his brain" (letter to E. C. Stedman). With its completion he was free of his last debt to the past, and, at the threshold of his final and most mature period of artistic and intellectual growth, the ascendency of thought over passion dawned upon him. The gigantic labor bestowed by him upon his translation of Goethe's "Faust" hastened this full development of his powers; and while the task of adequately transposing the German into English enriched his mind and taught him to give closer heed to form, or as he put it, "to the secret of expression," the poem itself suggested to him a new range of ideas.

"The Sunshine of the Gods" marks the dividing line between the period through which he had passed and the one upon which he was entering. Not long afterwards the "Home Pastorals" appeared. In them he thrust, as he was "learning to do" (letter to T. B. Aldrich, 1872), the "basis of clear symmetrical reality under the forms of fancy." These pastorals he conceived and wrote under the stimulus of his study of Goethe, whose "Hermann and Dorothea" convinced him that the hexameter might be mastered in English no less effectively than it had been in German. His endeavor, in his pastorals, to

make it ring with music was so successful that Emerson was moved to write (letter to J. T. Fields, December 12, 1870):—

"I . . . lately wondered whether Clough had risen again and was pouring rich English hexameters, until I pleased myself with discovering the singer without external hint of any kind, only by the wide travel."

The Pennsylvania ballads, the odes, and other poems, from this time to Taylor's premature death, are as so many stepping-stones to the higher goal for which he was striving. In the way of a narrative poem, the production of "Lars" is one of his best achievements; while the "Improvisations," "Peach Blossoms," and "Assyrian Song" reveal that in no wise had his lyrical gift suffered by the stage of his growth which some would call metaphysical, but which he was better pleased to characterize as psychological.

Although in bulk and substance Taylor's three dramatic poems, "The Masque of the Gods," "The Prophet," and "Prince Deukalion," form an integral part of the poetical outcome of this latter period, they are not embraced in the present collection, but are published in a separate volume. With the exception of these three dramas, all the poems which Bayard Taylor intended should be known as his, or might have desired to see included in his works, are now given to the public in this new and revised edition.

M. T.

New York, January, 1902.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Bayard Taylor was born January 11, 1825, in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. He was of Quaker descent, and although not actually belonging to the "Friends," was reared in the principles of their Society. His education was restricted to that of a country academy, which did not afford him more than the commonest teaching. He himself, however, supplemented this by his eagerness to gain information in any way that offered. He read at an early age all the books to be found in the village library and in the possession of friends; but outside of books Nature was his teacher. Roaming through the woods which surrounded his father's farm, and musing on the banks of rippling streams, he caught the melodies of song, the expression of which was a necessity to him as long as he lived. Even as early as in his eighth year he began to write poetry, and when a youth of sixteen he saw his first poem in print. The year after, in 1842, he was placed in a printing-office, to become a printer, — a vocation which he soon left, to satisfy a desire for travel. It was a true instinct which led him to see the world; he gained by it what he could not get in any other way — his university education; and the knowledge he gathered of countries and peoples was so much capital invested in the interest of poetry. Each record of travel published by him was followed by a volume of poems; and later in life, when his works of travel ceased, and his prose took the form of fiction, poetry became more than ever the controlling object of interest.

His first volume of poems, which afterwards he wished forgotten, was published in 1844, just before he left the printing-office to make his first journey in Europe. It is called "Ximena; or, The Battle of the Sierra Morena, and other Poems." The fruit of his two years' wanderings in Europe was "Views Afoot; or, Europe seen with Knapsack and Staff," succeeded by "Rhymes of Travel, Ballads, and Poems," which appeared in 1848, shortly after he had settled in New York, and had become engaged on the staff of the New York "Tribune." The following year he made his second journey, as correspondent for that paper, to California, the newly discovered gold-mine of the continent. The result was a prose volume, "Eldorado; or, Adventures in the Path of Empire," which was soon followed by a new collection of poems, entitled, "A Book of Romances, Lyrics, and Songs." When this volume made its appearance, its author was already embarked for Egypt and the Orient, India and Japan, — a series of travels which occupied more than two successive years. He returned at the close of 1853, and brought back with him material for three volumes of prose: "A Journey to Central Africa; or, Life and Landscapes from Egypt to the Negro Kingdoms of the Nile;" "The Lands of the Saracens; or, Pictures of Palestine, Asia Minor, Sicily, and

Spain;" and "A Visit to India, China, and Japan in the year 1853." Almost simultaneously with these the "Poems of the Orient" came forth, to be followed by a new collection of the older poems, with the addition of a number of new ones, under the title of "Poems of Home and Travel." The summer of 1856 saw him once more in Europe. This time he visited Scandinavia, Russia, and Greece, and then published "Northern Travel," and "Travels in Greece and Russia, with an Excursion to Crete." "The Poet's Journal," which was written not long after (in 1860, although not published until two years later), was not directly connected with these travels; the poems contained in it were rather the healthy reaction from a most unpoetical field of labor into which he had been driven by circumstance, — the lecturing business.

With the completion of "The Poet's Journal" Bayard Taylor entered upon a new epoch of his poetical career. His travels for the sake of seeing the world and its people were now a thing of the past; he turned to the delineation of and the problems propounded by human character in three successive novels, "Hannah Thurston," "John Godfrey's Fortunes," and "The Story of Kennett," to be followed by a fourth one, "Joseph and his Friend," several years later (1870); he became also absorbed in contemplating the development of the artistic nature, as set forth in his next volume of poetry, "The Picture of St. John," whilst his mind was already busy with his great work, the translation of Goethe's "Faust." The former appeared in 1866; the first volume of the latter in 1870, and the second volume in 1871. Of prose volumes belonging to this period, aside from the novels, there are "By-Ways of Europe," sketches written during a two-years' stay abroad, and "Beauty and the Beast, and Tales of Home," a collection of short magazine stories.

The study entailed by the translation of "Faust" must have stimulated the creative power of the poet; for within the two years following the publication of the second part of "Faust," Bayard Taylor produced three large poems. Two of them — "The Masque of the Gods," and "The Prophet: A Tragedy" — are dramatic in form; the third, written between these two, is "Lars: A Pastoral of Norway." The two latter poems he wrote during a holiday abroad. After returning home, he published also a volume of all his shorter poems hitherto uncollected, which he called "Home Pastorals, Ballads, and Lyrics." In 1876 he was called upon to write the "National Ode" for the Centennial Fourth of July; and shortly before his death, his last work of importance — the dramatic poem "Prince Deukalion" — was issued.

There are publications of Bayard Taylor's of which no mention has been made in this brief sketch. They are those of minor consideration, which did not seem pertinent to our purpose. It is the poet with whom we have to deal here, and as a poet we see him not only in his poetical works, but also in his books of travel, in his novels and tales. From a youth, worshipping devoutly at the shrine of Poesy, he grew into the man setting his poetic goal higher and higher the more he advanced, never flagging in aspiration to the end. He died at Berlin, Germany, where, as minister, he was the representative of the United States, on December 19, 1878.

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The manuscript of Bedouin Song was kindly lent by Mr. Richard Henry Stoddard.

EARLY POEMS

LYRICS

1845–1851

THE HARP: AN ODE

I

When bleak winds through the Northern pines were sweeping,
Some hero-skald, reclining on the sand,
Attuned it first, the chords harmonious keeping
With murmuring forest and with moaning strand:
And when, at night, the horns of mead foamed over,
And torches flared around the wassail board,
It breathed no song of maid, nor sigh of lover,
It rang aloud the triumphs of the sword!
It mocked the thunders of the ice-ribbed ocean,
With clenched hands beating back the dragon's prow;
It gave Berserker arms their battle motion,
And swelled the red veins on the Viking's brow!

II

No myrtle, plucked in dalliance, ever sheathed it,
To melt the savage ardor of its flow;
The only gauds wherewith its lord enwreathed it,
The lusty fir and Druid mistletoe.
Thus bound, it kept the old, accustomed cadence,
Whether it pealed through slumberous ilex bowers
In stormy wooing of Byzantine maidens,
Or shook Trinacria's languid lap of flowers;
Whether Genseric's conquering march it chanted,
Till cloudy Atlas rang with Gothic staves,
Or where gray Calpè's pillared feet are planted,
Died grandly out upon the unknown waves!

III

Not unto Scania's bards alone belonging,
The craft that loosed its tongues of changing sound,
For Ossian played, and ghosts of heroes, thronging,
Leaned on their spears above the misty mound.
The Cambrian eagle, round his eyrie winging,
Heard the wild chant through mountain-passes rolled,
When bearded throats chimed in with mighty singing,
And monarchs listened, in their torques of gold:
Its dreary wail, blent with the seamews' clangor,
Surged round the lonely keep of Penmaen-Mawr;
It pealed aloud, in battle's glorious anger,
Behind the banner of the Blazing Star!

IV

The strings are silent; who shall dare to wake them,
Though later deeds demand their living powers?
Silent in other lands, what hand shall make them
Leap as of old, to shape the songs of ours?

Here, while the sapless bulk of Europe moulders,
Springs the rich blood to hero-veins unsealed, —
Source of that Will, that on its fearless shoulders
Would bear the world's fate lightly as a shield:
Here moves a larger life, to grander measures
Beneath our sky and through our forests rung;
Why sleeps the harp, forgetful of its treasures, —
Buried in songs that never yet were sung?

V

Great, solemn songs, that with majestic sounding
Should swell the Nation's heart from sea to sea;
Informed with power, with earnest hope abounding
And prophecies of triumph yet to be!
Songs, by the wild wind for a thousand ages
Hummed o'er our central prairies, vast and lone;
Glassed by the Northern lakes in crystal pages,
And carved by hills on pinnacles of stone;
Songs chanted now, where undiscovered fountains
Make in the wilderness their babbling home,
And through the deep-hewn cañons of the mountains
Plunge the cold rivers in perpetual foam!

VI

Sung but by these: our forests have no voices;
Rapt with no loftier strain our rivers roll;
Far in the sky, no song-crowned peak rejoices
In words that give the silent air a soul.
Wake, mighty Harp! and thrill the shores that hearken
For the first peal of thine immortal rhyme:
Call from the shadows that begin to darken
The beaming forms of our heroic time:
Sing us of deeds, that on thy strings outsoaring
The ancient soul they glorified so long,
Shall win the world to hear thy grand restoring,
And own thy latest thy sublimest song!

1850.

SERAPION

Come hither, Child! thou silent, shy
Young creature of the glorious eye!
Though never yet by ruder air
Than father's kiss or mother's prayer
Were stirred the tendrils of thy hair,
The sadness of a soul that stands
Withdrawn from Childhood's frolic bands,
A stranger in the land, I trace
Upon thy brow's cherubic grace
The tender pleadings of thy face,
Where other stars than Joy and Hope
Have cast thy being's horoscope.

For thee, the threshold of the world
Is yet with morning dews impearled;
The nameless radiance of Birth
Imbathes thy atmosphere of Earth,
And, like a finer sunshine, swims
Round every motion of thy limbs:
The sweet, sad wonder and surprise
Of waking glimmers in thine eyes,
And wiser instinct, purer sense,
And gleams of rare intelligence
Betray the converse held by thee
With the angelic family.

Come hither, Boy! For while I press
Thy lips' confiding tenderness,
Less broad and dark the spaces be
Which Life has set 'twixt thee and me.
Thy soul's white feet shall soon depart
On paths I walked with eager heart;
God give thee, in His kindly grace,
A brighter road, a loftier place!
I see thy generous nature flow
In boundless trust to friend and foe,
And leap, despite of shocks and harms,

To clasp the world in loving arms.
I see that glorious circle shrink
Back to thy feet, at Manhood's brink,
Narrowed to one, one image fair,
And all its splendor gathered there.
The shackles of experience then
Sit lightly as on meaner men:
In flinty paths thy feet may bleed,
Thorns pierce thy flesh, thou shalt not heed,
Till when, all panting from the task,
Thine arms outspread their right shall ask,
Thine arms outspread that right shall fly,
The star shall burst, the splendor die!
Go, with thy happier brothers play,
As heedless and as wild as they;
Seek not so soon thy separate way,
Thou lamb in Childhood's field astray!

Whence camest thou? what angel bore
Thee past so many a fairer shore
Of guarding love, and guidance mild,
To drop thee on this barren wild?
Thy soul is lonely as a star,
When all its fellows muffled are, —
A single star, whose light appears
To glimmer through subduing tears.
The father who begat thee sees
In thee no deeper mysteries
Than load his heavy ledger's page,
And swell for him thy heritage.
A hard, cold man, of punctual face,
Renowned in Credit's holy-place,
Whose very wrinkles seem arrayed
In cunning hieroglyphs of trade, —
Whose gravest thought but just unlocks
The problems of uncertain stocks, —
Whose farthest flights of hope extend
From dividend to dividend.
Thy mother, — but a mother's name
Too sacred is, too sweet for blame.
No doubt she loves thee, — loves the shy,
Strange beauty of thy glorious eye;
Loves the soft mouth, whose drooping line
Is silent music; loves to twine
Thy silky hair in ringlets trim;
To watch thy lightsome play of limb;
But, God forgive me! I, who find
The soul within that beauty shrined,
I love thee more, I know thy worth
Better, than she who gave thee birth.

Are they thy keepers? They would thrust
The priceless jewel in the dust;
Would tarnish in their careless hold
The vessel of celestial gold.
Who gave them thee? What fortune lent
Their hands the delicate instrument,
Which finer hands might teach to hymn
The harmonies of Seraphim,
Which they shall make discordant soon,
The sweet bells jangled, out of tune?
Mine eyes are dim: I cannot see
The purposes of Destiny,
But than my love Heaven could not shine
More lovingly, if thou wert mine!
Rest then securely on my heart:
Give me thy trust: *my* child thou art,
And I shall lead thee through the years
To Hopes and Passions, Loves and Fears,
Till, following up Life's endless plan
A strong and self-dependent Man,
I see thee stand and strive with men:
Thy Father now, thy Brother then.

1851.

"MOAN, YE WILD WINDS!"

Moan, ye wild winds! around the pane,
And fall, thou drear December rain!
Fill with your gusts the sullen day,
Tear the last clinging leaves away!
Reckless as yonder naked tree,
No blast of yours can trouble me.

Give me your chill and stern embrace,
And pour your baptism on my face,
Sound in mine ears the airy moan
That sweeps in desolate monotone,
Where on the unsheltered hill-top beat
The marches of your homeless feet.

Moan on, ye winds! and pour, thou rain!
Your stormy sobs and tears are vain,
If shed for her whose fading eyes

Will open soon on Paradise:
The eye of Heaven shall blinded be,
Or ere ye cease, if shed for me.

1850.

TAURUS

I

The Scorpion's stars crawl down behind the sun,
And when he drops below the verge of day,
The glittering fangs, their fervid courses run,
Cling to his skirts and follow him away.
Then, ere the heels of flying Capricorn
Have touched the western mountain's darkening rim,
I mark, stern Taurus, through the twilight gray
The glinting of thy horn,
And sullen front, uprising large and dim,
Bent to the starry hunter's sword, at bay.

II

Thy hoofs, unwilling, climb the sphery vault;
Thy red eye trembles with an angry glare,
When the hounds follow, and in fierce assault
Bay through the fringes of the lion's hair.
The stars that once were mortal in their love,
And by their love are made immortal now,
Cluster like golden bees upon thy mane,
When thou, possessed with Jove,
Bore sweet Europa's garlands on thy brow,
And stole her from the green Sicilian plain.

III

Type of the stubborn force that will not bend
To loftier art, — soul of defiant breath
That blindly stands and battles to the end,
Nerving resistance with the throes of death, —
Majestic Taurus! when thy wrathful eye
Flamed brightest, and thy hoofs a moment stayed
Their march at Night's meridian, I was born:
But in the western sky,
Like sweet Europa, Love's fair star delayed,
To hang her garland on thy silver horn.

IV

Thou giv'st that temper of enduring mould,
That slights the wayward bent of Destiny, —
Such as sent forth the shaggy Jarls of old
To launch their dragons on the unknown sea:
Such as keep strong the sinews of the sword,
The proud, hot blood of battle, — welcome made
The headsman's axe, the rack, the martyr-fire,
The ignominious cord,
When but to yield, had pomps and honors laid
On heads that moulder in ignoble mire.

V

Night is the summer when the soul grows ripe
With Life's full harvest: of her myriad suns,
Thou dost not gild the quiet herdsman's pipe,
Nor royal state, that royal actions shuns.
But in the noontide of thy ruddy stars
Thrive strength, and daring, and the blood whence springs
The Heraclidean seed of heroes; then
Were sundered Gaza's bars;
Then, 'mid the smitten Hydra's loosened rings,
His slayer rested, in the Lernean fen.

VI

Thine is the subtle element that turns
To fearless act the impulse of the hour, —
The secret fire, whose flash electric burns
To every source of passion and of power.
Therefore I hail thee, on thy glittering track:
Therefore I watch thee, when the night grows dark,
Slow-rising, front Orion's sword along
The starry zodiac,
And from thy mystic beam demand a spark
To warm my soul with more heroic song.

California, 1849.

AUTUMNAL VESPERS

The clarion Wind, that blew so loud at morn,
Whirling a thousand leaves from every bough
Of the purple woods, has not a whisper now;
Hushed on the uplands is the huntsman's horn,
And huskers whistling round the tented corn:
The snug warm cricket lets his clock run down,
Scared by the chill, sad hour that makes forlorn
The Autumn's gold and brown.

The light is dying out on field and wold;
The life is dying in the leaves and grass.
The World's last breath no longer dims the glass
Of waning sunset, yellow, pale, and cold.
His genial pulse, which Summer made so bold,
Has ceased. Haste, Night, and spread thy decent pall!
The silent, stiffening Frost makes havoc: fold
The darkness over all!

The light is dying out o'er all the land,
And in my heart the light is dying.
She,
My life's best life, is fading silently
From Earth, from me, and from the dreams we planned,
Since first Love led us with his beaming hand
From hope to hope, yet kept his crown in store.
The light is dying out o'er all the land:
To me it comes no more.

The blossom of my heart, she shrinks away,
Stricken with deadly blight: more wan and weak
Her love replies in blanching lip and cheek,
And gentler in her dear eyes, day by day.
God, in Thy mercy, bid the arm delay,
Which through her being smites to dust my own!
Thou gav'st the seed thy sun and showers; why slay
The blossoms yet unblown?

In vain, — in vain! God will not bid the Spring
Replace with sudden green the Autumn's gold;
And as the night-mists, gathering damp and cold,
Strike up the vales where watercourses sing,
Death's mists shall strike along her veins, and cling
Thenceforth forever round her glorious frame:
For all her radiant presence, May shall bring
A memory and a name.

What know the woods, that soon shall be so stark?
What know the barren fields, the songless air,
Locked in benumbing cold, of blooms more fair
In mornings ushered by the April lark?
Weak solace this, which grief will never hark;

Blind as a bud in stiff December's mail,
To lift her look beyond the frozen dark
No memory can avail.

I never knew the autumnal eves could wear,
With all their pomp, so drear a hue of Death;
I never knew their still and solemn breath
Could rob the breaking heart of strength to bear,
Feeding the blank submission of despair.
Yet, peace, sad soul! reproach and pity shine
Suffused through starry tears: bend thou in prayer,
Rebuked by Love divine.

Our life is scarce the twinkle of a star
In God's eternal day. Obscure and dim
With mortal clouds, it yet may beam for Him,
And darkened here, shine fair to spheres afar.
I will be patient, lest my sorrow bar
His grace and blessing, and I fall supine:
In my own hands my want and weakness are, —
My strength, O God! in Thine.

1850.

ODE TO SHELLEY

I

Why art thou dead? Upon the hills once more
The golden mist of waning Autumn lies;
The slow-pulsed billows wash along the shore,
And phantom isles are floating in the skies.
They wait for thee: a spirit in the sand
Hushes, expectant for thy coming tread;
The light wind pants to lift thy trembling hair;
Inward, the silent land
Lies with its mournful woods; — why art thou dead,
When Earth demands that thou shalt call her fair?

II

Why art thou dead? I too demand thy song,
To speak the language yet denied to mine,
Twin-doomed with thee, to feel the scorn of Wrong,
To worship Beauty as a thing divine!
Thou art afar: wilt thou not soon return
To tell me that which thou hast never told?
To clasp my throbbing hand, and, by the shore
Or dewy mountain-fern,
Pour out thy heart as to a friend of old,
Touched with a twilight sadness? Nevermore.

III

I could have told thee all the sylvan joy
Of trackless woods; the meadows far apart,
Within whose fragrant grass, a lonely boy,
I thought of God; the trumpet at my heart,
When on bleak mountains roared the midnight storm,
And I was bathed in lightning, broad and grand:
Oh, more than all, with soft and reverent breath
And forehead flushing warm,
I would have led thee through the summer land
Of early Love, and past my dreams of Death!

IV

In thee, Immortal Brother! had I found
That Voice of Earth, that fails my feebler lines:
The awful speech of Rome's sepulchral ground;
The dusky hymn of Vallombrosa's pines!

From thee the noise of Ocean would have taken
A grand defiance round the moveless shores,
And vocal grown the Mountain's silent head:
Canst thou not yet awaken
Beneath the funeral cypress? Earth implores
Thy presence for her son; — why art thou dead?

V

I do but rave: for it is better thus.
Were once thy starry nature given to mine,
In the one life which would encircle us
My voice would melt, my soul be lost in thine.
Better to bear the far sublimer pain
Of Thought that has not ripened into speech,
To hear in silence Truth and Beauty sing
Divinely to the brain;
For thus the Poet at the last shall reach
His own soul's voice, nor crave a brother's string.

1848.

SICILIAN WINE

I 'VE drunk Sicilia's crimson wine!
The blazing vintage pressed
From grapes on Etna's breast,
What time the mellowing autumn sun did shine:
I 've drunk the wine!
I feel its blood divine
Poured on the sluggish tide of mine,
Till, kindling slow,
Its fountains glow
With the light that swims
On their trembling brims,
And a molten sunrise floods my limbs!
What do I here?
I 've drunk the wine,
And lo! the bright blue heaven is clear
Above the ocean's bluer sphere,
Seen through the long arcades of pine,
Inwoven and arched with vine!
The glades are green below;
The temple shines afar;
Above, old Etna's snow
Sparkles with many an icy star:
I see the mountain and its marble wall,
Where gleaming waters fall
And voices call,
Singing and calling
Like chorals falling
Through pearly doors of some Olympian hall,
Where Love holds bacchanal.

Sicilian wine! Sicilian wine!
Summer, and Music, and Song divine
Are thine, — all thine!
A sweet wind over the roses plays;
The wild bee hums at my languid ear;
The mute-winged moth serenely strays
On the downy atmosphere,
Like hovering Sleep, that overweighs
My lids with his shadow, yet comes not near.
Who 'll share with me this languor?
With me the juice of Etna sip?
Who press the goblet's lip,
Refusing mine the while with love's enchanting anger?
Would I were young Adonis now!
With what an ardor bold
Within my arms I 'd fold
Fair Aphrodite of Idalian mould,
And let the locks that hide her gleaming brow
Fall o'er my shoulder as she lay
With the fair swell of her immortal breast
Upon my bosom pressed,
Giving Olympian thrills to its enamored clay!

Bacchus and Pan have fled:
No heavy Satyr crushes with his tread
The verdure of the meadow ground,
But in their stead
The Nymphs are leading a bewildering round,
Vivid and light, as o'er some flowering rise
A dance of butterflies,
Their tossing hair with slender lilies crowned,
And greener ivy than o'erran
The brows of Bacchus and the reed of Pan!

I faint, I die:
The flames expire,
That made my blood a lurid fire:
Steeped in delicious weariness I lie.
Oh lay me in some pearlèd shell,
Soft-balanced on the rippling sea,
Where sweet, cheek-kissing airs may wave
Their fresh wings over me;
Let me be wafted with the swell
Of Nereid voices: let no billow rave
To break the cool green crystal of the sea.
For I will wander free
Past the blue islands and the fading shores,
To Calpè and the far Azores,
And still beyond, and wide away,
Beneath the dazzling wings of tropic day,
Where, on unruffled seas,
Sleep the green isles of the Hesperides.

The Triton's trumpet calls:
I hear, I wake, I rise:
The sound peals up the skies
And mellowed Echo falls
In answer back from Heaven's cerulean walls.
Give me the lyre that Orpheus played upon,
Or bright Hyperion, —
Nay, rather come, thou of the mighty bow,
Come thou below,
Leaving thy steeds unharnessed go!
Sing as thou wilt, my voice shall dare to follow,
And I will sun me in thine awful glow,
Divine Apollo!
Then thou thy lute shalt twine
With Bacchic tendrils of the glorious vine
That gave Sicilian wine:
And henceforth when the breezes run
Over its clusters, ripening in the sun,
The leaves shall still be playing,
Unto thy lute its melody repaying,
And I, that quaff, shall evermore be free
To mount thy car and ride the heavens with thee!

1848.

STORM-LINES

When the rains of November are dark on the hills, and the pine-trees incessantly roar
To the sound of the wind-beaten crags, and the floods that in foam through their black channels pour:

When the breaker-lined coast stretches dimly afar through the desolate waste of the gale,
And the clang of the sea-gull at nightfall is heard from the deep, like a mariner's wail:

When the gray sky drops low, and the forest is bare, and the laborer is housed from the storm,
And the world is a blank, save the light of his home through the gust shining redly and warm: —

Go thou forth, if the brim of thy heart with its tropical fulness of life overflow, —
If the sun of thy bliss in the zenith is hung, nor a shadow reminds thee of woe!

Leave the home of thy love; leave thy labors of fame; in the rain and the darkness go forth,
When the cold winds unpausingly wail as they drive from the cheerless expanse of the North.

Thou shalt turn from the cup that was mantling before; thou shalt hear the eternal despair
Of the hearts that endured and were broken at last, from the hills and the sea and the air!

Thou shalt hear how the Earth, the maternal, laments for the children she nurtured with tears, —
How the forest but deepens its wail and the breakers their roar, with the march of the years!

Then the gleam of thy hearth-fire shall dwindle away, and the lips of thy loved ones be still;

And thy soul shall lament in the moan
of the storm, sounding wide on
the shelterless hill.

All the woes of existence shall stand
at thy heart, and the sad eyes
of myriads implore,
In the darkness and storm of their
being, the ray, streaming out
through thy radiant door.

Look again: how that star of thy Para-
dise dims, through the warm
tears, unwittingly shed; —
Thou art man, and a sorrow so bitterly
wrung never fell on the dust of
the Dead!

Let the rain of the midnight beat cold
on thy cheek, and the proud
pulses chill in thy frame,
Till the love of thy bosom is grateful
and sad, and thou turn'st from
the mockery of Fame!

Take with humble acceptance the gifts
of thy life; let thy joy touch
the fountain of tears;
For the soul of the Earth, in endur-
ance and pain, gathers promise
of happier years!

1849.

THE TWO VISIONS

Through days of toil, through nightly
fears,
A vision blessed my heart for years;
And so secure its features grew,
My heart believed the blessing true.

I saw her there, a household dove,
In consummated peace of love,
And sweeter joy and saintlier grace
Breathed o'er the beauty of her face:

The joy and grace of love at rest,
The fireside music of the breast,
When vain desires and restless schemes
Sleep, pillowed on our early dreams.

Nor her alone: beside her stood,
In gentler types, our love renewed;
Our separate beings one, in Birth, —
The darling miracles of Earth.

The mother's smile, the children's
kiss,
And home's serene, abounding bliss;
The fruitage of a life that bore
But idle summer blooms before:

Such was the vision, far and sweet,
That, still beyond Time's lagging feet,
Lay glimmering in my heart for
years,
Dim with the mist of happy tears.

That vision died, in drops of woe,
In blotting drops, dissolving slow:
Now, toiling day and sorrowing night,
Another vision fills my sight.

A cold mound in the winter snow;
A colder heart at rest below;
A life in utter loneness hurled,
And darkness over all the world.

1850.

STORM SONG

The clouds are scudding across the
moon,
A misty light is on the sea;
The wind in the shrouds has a wintry
tune,
And the foam is flying free.

Brothers, a night of terror and
gloom
Speaks in the cloud and gathering
roar;
Thank God, He has given us broad
sea-room,
A thousand miles from shore.

Down with the hatches on those who
sleep!
The wild and whistling deck have
we;
Good watch, my brothers, to-night
we 'll keep,
While the tempest is on the sea!

Though the rigging shriek in his
terrible grip,
And the naked spars be snapped
away,
Lashed to the helm, we 'll drive our
ship
In the teeth of the whelming spray!

Hark! how the surges o'erleap the deck!
Hark! how the pitiless tempest raves!
Ah, daylight will look upon many a wreck
Drifting over the desert waves.

Yet, courage, brothers! we trust the wave,
With God above us, our guiding chart:
So, whether to harbor or ocean-grave,
Be it still with a cheery heart!

Gulf of Mexico, 1850.

SONG

I PLUCKED for thee the wilding rose
And wore it on my breast,
And there, till daylight's dusky close,
Its silken cheek was pressed;
Its desert breath was sweeter far
Than palace-rose could be,
Sweeter than all Earth's blossoms are,
But that thou gav'st to me.

I kissed its leaves, in fond despite
Of lips that failed my own,
And Love recalled that sacred night
His blushing flower was blown.
I vowed, no rose should rival mine,
Though withered now, and pale,
Till those are plucked, whose white buds twine
Above thy bridal veil.

1849.

THE WAVES

I

CHILDREN are we
Of the restless sea,
Swelling in anger or sparkling in glee;
We follow our race,
In shifting chase,
Over the boundless ocean-space!
Who hath beheld where the race begun?
Who shall behold it run?
Who shall behold it run?

II

When the smooth airs keep
Their noontide sleep,
We dimple the cheek of the dreaming deep;
When the rough winds come,
From their cloudy home,
At the tap of the hurricane's thunder-drum,
Deep are the furrows of wrath we plough,
Ridging his darkened brow!
Ridging his darkened brow!

III

Over us born,
The unclouded Morn
Trumpets her joy with the Triton's horn,
And sun and star
By the thousand are
Orbed in our glittering, near and far:
And the splendor of Heaven, the pomp of Day,
Shine in our laughing spray!
Shine in our laughing spray!

IV

We murmur our spell
Over sand and shell;
We girdle the reef with a combing swell;
And bound in the vice,
Of the Arctic ice,
We build us a palace of grand device —
Walls of crystal and splintered spires,
Flashing with diamond fires!
Flashing with diamond fires!

V

In the endless round
Of our motion and sound,
The fairest dwelling of Beauty is found,
And with voice of strange
And solemn change,
The elements speak in our world-wide range,
Harping the terror, the might, the mirth,
Sorrows and hopes of Earth!
Sorrows and hopes of Earth!

1850.

SONG

From the bosom of ocean I seek thee,
Thou lamp of my spirit afar,
As the seaman, adrift in the darkness,
Looks up for the beam of his star;
And when on the moon-lighted water
The spirits of solitude sleep,
My soul, in the light of thy beauty,
Lies hushed as the waves of the deep.

As the shafts of the sunrise are broken
Far over the glittering sea,
Thou hast dawned on the waves of my dreaming,
And each thought has a sparkle of thee.
And though, with the white sail distended,
I speed from the vanishing shore,
Thou wilt give to the silence of ocean
The spell of thy beauty the more.

Gulf of Mexico, 1850.

SONNET

TO G. H. B.

You comfort me as one that, knowing Fate,
Would paint her visage kinder than you deem;
You say, my only bliss that is no dream
She clouds, but makes not wholly desolate.
Ah, Friend! your heart speaks words of little weight
To veil that sadder knowledge, learned in song,
And 'gainst your solace Grief has made me strong:
The Gods are jealous of our low estate;
They give not Fame to Love, nor Love to Fame;
Power cannot taste the joy the humbler share,
Nor holy Beauty breathe in Luxury's air,
And all in darkness Genius feeds his flame.
We build and build, poor fools! and all the while
Some Demon works unseen, and saps the pile.

1850.

THE WAYSIDE DREAM

The deep and lordly Danube
Goes winding far below;
I see the white-walled hamlets
Amid his vineyards glow,
And southward, through the ether, shine
The Styrian hills of snow.

O'er many a league of landscape
Sleeps the warm haze of noon;
The wooing winds come freighted
With messages of June,
And down among the corn and flowers
I hear the water's tune.

The meadow-lark is singing,
As if it still were morn;
Within the dark pine-forest
The hunter winds his horn,
And the cuckoo's shy, complaining note
Mocks the maidens in the corn.

I watch the cloud-armada
Go sailing up the sky,
Lulled by the murmuring mountain grass
Upon whose bed I lie,
And the faint sound of noonday chimes
That in the distance die.

A warm and drowsy sweetness
Is stealing o'er my brain;
I see no more the Danube
Sweep through his royal plain;
I hear no more the peasant girls
Singing amid the grain.

Soft, silvery wings, a moment
Have swept across my brow:
Again I hear the water,
But its voice is sweeter now,
And the mocking-bird and oriole
Are singing on the bough;

The elm and linden branches
Droop close and dark o'erhead,
And the foaming forest brooklet
Leaps down its rocky bed:
Be still, my heart! the seas are passed,
The paths of home I tread!

The showers of creamy blossoms
Are on the linden spray,
And down the clover meadow
They heap the scented hay,
And glad winds toss the forest leaves,
All the bright summer day.

Old playmates! bid me welcome
Amid your brother-band;
Give me the old affection,—
The glowing grasp of hand!
I seek no more the realms of old,—
Here is my Fatherland!

Come hither, gentle maiden,
Who weep'st in tender joy!
The rapture of thy presence
Repays the world's annoy,
And calms the wild and ardent heart
Which warms the wandering boy.

In many a mountain fastness,
By many a river's foam,
And through the gorgeous cities,
'T was loneliness to roam;
For the sweetest music in my heart
Was the olden songs of home.

Ah, glen and grove are vanished,
And friends have faded now!
The balmy Styrian breezes
Are blowing on my brow,
And sounds again the cuckoo's call
From the forest's inmost bough.

Fled is that happy vision,—
The gates of slumber fold;
I rise and journey onward
Through valleys green and old,
Where the far, white Alps announce the morn,
And keep the sunset's gold.

Upper Austria, 1845.

STEYERMARK

In Steyermark, — green Steyermark,
The fields are bright and the forests dark, —
Bright with the maids that bind the sheaves,
Dark with the arches of whispering leaves.
Voices and streams and sweet bells chime
Over the land, in the harvest-time,
And the blithest songs of the finch and lark
Are heard in the orchards of Steyermark.

In Steyermark, — old Steyermark,
The mountain summits are white and stark;
The rough winds furrow their trackless snow,
But the mirrors of crystal are smooth below;
The stormy Danube clasps the wave
That downward sweeps with the Drave and Save,
And the Euxine is whitened with many a bark,
Freighted with ores of Steyermark!

In Steyermark, — rough Steyermark,
The anvils ring from dawn till dark;
The molten streams of the furnace glare,
Blurring with crimson the midnight air;
The lusty voices of forgemen chord,
Chanting the ballad of Siegfried's Sword,
While the hammers swung by their arms so stark
Strike to the music of Steyermark!

In Steyermark, — dear Steyermark,
Each heart is light as the morning lark;
There men are framed in the manly mould
Of their stalwart sires, of the times of old,
And the sunny blue of the Styrian sky
Grows soft in the timid maiden's eye,
When love descends with the twilight dark,
In the beechen groves of Steyermark.

1848.

TO A BAVARIAN GIRL

Thou, Bavaria's brown-eyed daughter,
Art a shape of joy,

THE ARNO (Page 15)

Standing by the Isar's water
With thy brother-boy;
In thy dream, with idle fingers
Threading through his curls,
On thy cheek the sun's kiss lingers,
Rosiest of girls!

Woods of glossy oak are ringing
With the echoes bland,
While thy generous voice is singing
Songs of Fatherland, —
Songs, that by the Danube's river
Sound on hills of vine,
And where waves in green light quiver,
Down the rushing Rhine.

Life, with all its hues and changes,
To thy heart doth lie
Like those dreamy Alpine ranges
In the southern sky;
Where in haze the clefts are hidden,
Which the foot should fear,
And the crags that fall unbidden
Startle not the ear.

Where the village maidens gather
At the fountain's brim,
Or in sunny harvest weather,
With the reapers trim;
Where the autumn fires are burning
On the vintage-hills;
Where the mossy wheels are turning
In the ancient mills;

Where from ruined robber-towers
Hangs the ivy's hair,
And the crimson foxbell flowers
On the crumbling stair: —
Everywhere, without thy presence,
Would the sunshine fail,
Fairest of the maiden peasants!
Flower of Isar's vale!

Munich, 1845.

IN ITALY

Dear Lillian, all I wished is won!
I sit beneath Italia's sun,
Where olive-orchards gleam and quiver
Along the banks of Arno's river.

Through laurel leaves, the dim green light
Falls on my forehead as I write,
And the sweet chimes of vesper, ringing,
Blend with the contadina's singing.

Rich is the soil with Fancy's gold;
The stirring memories of old
Rise thronging in my haunted vision,
And wake my spirit's young ambition.

But as the radiant sunsets close
Above Val d'Arno's bowers of rose,
My soul forgets the olden glory,
And deems our love a dearer story.

Thy words, in Memory's ear, outchime
The music of the Tuscan rhyme;
Thou standest here — the gentle-hearted —
Amid the shades of bards departed.

I see before thee fade away
Their garlands of immortal bay,
And turn from Petrarch's passion-glances
To my own dearer heart-romances.

Sad is the opal glow that fires
The midnight of the cypress spires,
And cold the scented wind that closes
The heart of bright Etruscan roses.

A single thought of thee effaced
The fair Italian dream I chased;
For the true clime of song and sun
Lies in the heart which mine hath won!

Florence, 1845.

A BACCHIC ODE

Wine, — bring wine!
Let the crystal beaker flame and shine,
Brimming o'er with the draught divine!

The crimson glow
Of the lifted cup on my forehead throw,
Like the sunset's flush on a field of snow.

I love to lave
My thirsty lip in the ruddy wave;
Freedom bringeth the wine so brave!

The world is cold:
Sorrow and pain have gloomy hold,
Chilling the bosom warm and bold

Doubts and fears
Veil the shine of my morning years, —
My life's lone rainbow springs from tears.

But Eden-gleams
Visit my soul in immortal dreams,
When the wave of the goblet burns and beams.

Not from the Rhine,
Not from fields of Burgundian vine,
Bring me the bright Olympian wine!

Not with a ray
Born where the winds of Shiraz play,
Or the fiery blood of the bright Tokay.

Not where the glee
Of Falernian vintage echoes free,
Or the Chian gardens gem the sea.

But wine, — bring wine,
Royally flushed with its growth divine,
In the crystal depth of my soul to shine!

Whose glow was caught
From the warmth which Fancy's summer brought
To the vintage-fields in the Land of Thought.

Rich and free
To my thirsting soul will the goblet be,
Poured by the Hebe, Poesy.

1847.

A FUNERAL THOUGHT

I

When the stern Genius, to whose hollow tramp
Echo the startled chambers of the soul,
Waves his inverted torch o'er that pale camp
Where the archangel's final trumpets roll,
I would not meet him in the chamber dim,
Hushed, and pervaded with a nameless fear,
When the breath flutters and the senses swim,
And the dread hour is near.

II

Though Love's dear arms might clasp me fondly then
As if to keep the Summoner at bay,
And woman's woe and the calm grief of men
Hallow at last the chill, unbreathing clay —
These are Earth's fetters, and the soul would shrink,
Thus bound, from Darkness and the dread Unknown,
Stretching its arms from Death's eternal brink,
Which it must dare alone.

III

But in the awful silence of the sky,
Upon some mountain summit, yet untrod,
Through the blue ether would I climb, to die
Afar from mortals and alone with God!
To the pure keeping of the stainless air
Would I resign my faint and fluttering breath,
And with the rapture of an answered prayer
Receive the kiss of Death.

IV

Then to the elements my frame would turn;
No worms should riot on my coffined clay,
But the cold limbs, from that sepulchral urn,
In the slow storms of ages waste away.
Loud winds and thunder's diapason high
Should be my requiem through the coming time,
And the white summit, fading in the sky,
My monument sublime.

1847.

THE NORSEMAN'S RIDE

The frosty fires of Northern starlight
Gleamed on the glittering snow,
And through the forest's frozen branches
The shrieking winds did blow;
A floor of blue, translucent marble
Kept ocean's pulses still,
When, in the depth of dreary midnight,
Opened the burial hill.

Then while a low and creeping shudder
Thrilled upward through the ground,
The Norseman came, as armed for battle,
In silence from his mound:
He, who was mourned in solemn sorrow
By many a swordsman bold,
And harps that wailed along the ocean,
Struck by the Skalds of old.

Sudden, a swift and silver shadow
Rushed up from out the gloom, —
A horse that stamped with hoof impatient,
Yet noiseless, on the tomb.
"Ha, Surtur! let me hear thy tramping,
Thou noblest Northern steed,
Whose neigh along the stormy headlands
Bade the bold Viking heed!"

He mounted: like a north-light streaking
The sky with flaming bars,
They, on the winds so wildly shrieking,
Shot up before the stars.
"Is this thy mane, my fearless Surtur,
That streams against my breast?
Is this thy neck, that curve of moonlight,
Which Helva's hand caressed?

"No misty breathing strains thy nostril,
Thine eye shines blue and cold,
Yet, mounting up our airy pathway,
I see thy hoofs of gold!
Not lighter o'er the springing rainbow
Walhalla's gods repair,
Than we, in sweeping journey over
The bending bridge of air.

"Far, far around, star-gleams are sparkling
Amid the twilight space;
And Earth, that lay so cold and darkling,
Has veiled her dusky face.
Are those the Nornes that beckon onward
To seats at Odin's board,
Where nightly by the hands of heroes
The foaming mead is poured?

"'T is Skuld! her star-eye speaks the glory
That waits the warrior's soul,
When on its hinge of music opens
The gateway of the Pole, —
When Odin's warder leads the hero
To banquets never done,
And Freya's eyes outshine in summer
The ever-risen sun.

"On! on! the Northern lights are streaming
In brightness like the morn,
And pealing far amid the vastness,
I hear the Gjallarhorn:
The heart of starry space is throbbing
With songs of minstrels old,
And now, on high Walhalla's portal,
Gleam Surtur's hoofs of gold!"

1846.

THE CONTINENTS

I had a vision in that solemn hour,
Last of the year sublime,
Whose wave sweeps downward, with its dying power
Rippling the shores of Time.
On the bleak margin of that hoary sea
My spirit stood alone,
Watching the gleams of phantom History,
Which through the darkness shone.

Then, when the bell of midnight ghostly hands
Tolled for the dead year's doom,
I saw the spirits of Earth's ancient lands

Stand up amid the gloom!
The crownèd deities, whose reign began
In the forgotten Past,
When first the fresh world gave to sovereign Man
Her empires green and vast.

First queenly ASIA, from the fallen thrones
Of twice three thousand years,
Came with the woe a grieving goddess owns,
Who longs for mortal tears.
The dust of ruin to her mantle clung
And dimmed her crown of gold,
While the majestic sorrows of her tongue
From Tyre to Indus rolled:

"Mourn with me, sisters, in my realm of woe,
Whose only glory streams
From its lost childhood, like the arctic glow
Which sunless Winter dreams!
In the red desert moulders Babylon,
And the wild serpent's hiss
Echoes in Petra's palaces of stone,
And waste Persepolis.

"Gone are the deities that ruled enshrined
In Elephanta's caves,
And Brahma's wailings fill the fragrant wind
That ripples Ganges' waves:
The ancient gods amid their temples fall,
And shapes of some near doom,
Trembling and waving on the Future's wall,
More fearful make my gloom!"

Then, from her seat, amid the palms embowered
That shade the lion-land,
Swart AFRICA in dusky aspect towered,
The fetters on her hand!
Backward she saw, from out her drear eclipse,
The mighty Theban years,
And the deep anguish of her mournful lips
Interpreted her tears.

"Woe for my children, whom your gyves have bound
Through centuries of toil;
The bitter wailings of whose bondage sound
From many an alien soil!
Leave me but free, though the eternal sand
Be all my kingdom now, —
Though the rude splendors of barbaric land
But mock my crownless brow!"

There was a sound, like sudden trumpets blown,
A ringing, as of arms,
When EUROPE rose, a stately amazon,
Stern in her mailèd charms.
She brooded long beneath the weary bars
That chafed her soul of flame,
And like a seer, who reads the awful stars,
Her words prophetic came:

"I hear new sounds along the ancient shore,
Whose dull old monotone
Of tides, that broke on many a system hoar,
Moaned through the ages lone:
I see a gleaming, like the crimson morn
Beneath a stormy sky,
And warning throes, which long my breast has borne,
Proclaim the struggle nigh."

O radiant-browed, the latest born of Time!
How waned thy sisters old,
Before the splendors of thine eye sublime,
And mien erect and bold!
Free, as the winds of thine own forests are,
Thy brow beamed lofty cheer,
And Day's bright oriflamme, the Morning Star,
Flashed on thy lifted spear.

"I bear no weight" — rang thine exulting tones —
"Of memories weird and vast;
No crushing heritage of iron thrones,
Bequeathed by some dead Past;

But hopes, that give my children power to climb
Above the old-world fears —
Whose prophecies forerun the latest time,
And lead the crowning years!

"Like spectral lamps, that burn before a tomb,
The ancient lights expire;
I hold a torch, that floods the fading gloom
With everlasting fire:
Crowned with my constellated stars, I stand
Beside the foaming sea,
And from the Future, with a victor's hand,
Claim empire for the Free!"

1848.

L'ENVOI

I'VE passed the grim and threatening warders
That guard the vestibule of Song,
And traced the print of bolder footsteps
The lengthened corridors along;
Where every thought I strove to blazon
Beside the bannered lays of old,
Was dim below some bright escutcheon,
Or shaded by some grander fold.

I saw, in veiled and shadowy glimpses,
The solemn halls expand afar,
And through the twilight, half despairing,
Looked trembling up to find a star;
Till, in the rush of wings, awakened
My soul to utterance free and strong
And with impassioned exultation,
I revelled in the rage of Song!

Then, though the world beside, unheeding,
Heard other voices than my own,
Thou, thou didst mark the broken music,
And cheer its proud, aspiring tone:
Thou cam'st in many a lovely vision
To lead my ardent spirit on,
Thine eye my morning-star of promise,
The sweet anticipant of dawn.

And if I look to holier altars,
Thou still art near me, as of old,
And thou wilt give the living laurel,
When the shrined Presence I behold.
Take, then, these echoes of thy being,
My lips have weakly striven to frame;
For when I speak what thou inspirest,
I know my songs are nearest fame.

1848.

CALIFORNIA BALLADS AND POEMS

1848–1851

MANUELA

FROM the doorway, Manuela, in the sunny April morn,
Southward looks, along the valley, over leagues of gleaming corn;
Where the mountain's misty rampart like the wall of Eden towers,
And the isles of oak are sleeping on a painted sea of flowers.

All the air is full of music, for the winter rains are o'er,
And the noisy magpies chatter from the budding sycamore;
Blithely frisk unnumbered squirrels, over all the grassy slope;
Where the airy summits brighten, nimbly leaps the antelope.

Gentle eyes of Manuela! tell me wherefore do ye rest
On the oak's enchanted islands and the flowery ocean's breast?
Tell me wherefore, down the valley, ye have traced the highway's mark
Far beyond the belts of timber, to the mountain-shadows dark?

Ah, the fragrant bay may blossom and the sprouting verdure shine
With the tears of amber dropping from the tassels of the pine,

And the morning's breath of balsam
lightly brush her sunny cheek, —
Little recketh Manuela of the tales of Spring they speak.

When the Summer's burning solstice
on the mountain-harvests glowed,
She had watched a gallant horseman
riding down the valley road;
Many times she saw him turning, looking back with parting thrills,
Till amid her tears she lost him, in the shadow of the hills.

Ere the cloudless moons were over, he had passed the Desert's sand,
Crossed the rushing Colorado and the wild Apachè Land,
And his laden mules were driven, when the time of rains began,
With the traders of Chihuahua, to the Fair of San Juan.

Therefore watches Manuela, — therefore lightly doth she start,
When the sound of distant footsteps seems the beating of her heart;
Not a wind the green oak rustles or the redwood branches stirs,
But she hears the silver jingle of his ringing bit and spurs.

Often, out the hazy distance, come the horsemen, day by day,
But they come not as Bernardo, — she can see it, far away;
Well she knows the airy gallop of his mettled alazàn,
Light as any antelope upon the Hills of Gavilàn.

She would know him 'mid a thousand, by his free and gallant air;
By the featly-knit sarápè, such as wealthy traders wear;
By his broidered calzoneros and his saddle, gayly spread,
With its cantle rimmed with silver, and its horn a lion's head.

None like him the light riáta on the maddened bull can throw;
None amid the mountain-cañons track like him the stealthy doe;
And at all the Mission festals, few indeed the revellers are
Who can dance with him the jota, touch with him the gay guitar.

He has said to Manuela, and the echoes linger still
In the cloisters of her bosom, with a secret, tender thrill,
When the bay again has blossomed, and the valley stands in corn,
Shall the bells of Santa Clara usher in the wedding morn.

He has pictured the procession, all in holiday attire,
And the laugh of bridal gladness, when they see the distant spire;
Then their love shall kindle newly, and the world be doubly fair
In the cool, delicious crystal of the summer morning air.

Tender eyes of Manuela! what has dimmed your lustrous beam?
'T is a tear that falls to glitter on the casket of her dream.
Ah, the eye of Love must brighten, if its watches would be true,
For the star is falsely mirrored in the rose's drop of dew!

But her eager eyes rekindle, and her breathless bosom thrills,
As she sees a horseman moving in the shadow of the hills:
Now in love and fond thanksgiving they may loose their pearly tides, —
'T is the alazàn that gallops, 't is Bernardo's self that rides!

Gulf of Mexico, 1850.

THE FIGHT OF PASO DEL MAR

Gusty and raw was the morning,
A fog hung over the seas,
And its gray skirts, rolling inland,
Were torn by the mountain trees;
No sound was heard but the dashing
Of waves on the sandy bar,
When Pablo of San Diego
Rode down to the Paso del Mar.

The pescadòr, out in his shallop,
Gathering his harvest so wide,

Sees the dim bulk of the headland
Loom over the waste of the tide;
He sees, like a white thread, the pathway
Wind round on the terrible wall,
Where the faint, moving speck of the rider
Seems hovering close to its fall.

Stout Pablo of San Diego
Rode down from the hills behind;
With the bells on his gray mule tinkling
He sang through the fog and wind.
Under his thick, misted eyebrows
Twinkled his eye like a star,
And fiercer he sang as the sea-winds
Drove cold on the Paso del Mar.

Now Bernal, the herdsman of Chino,
Had travelled the shore since dawn,
Leaving the ranches behind him —
Good reason had he to be gone!
The blood was still red on his dagger,
The fury was hot in his brain,
And the chill, driving scud of the breakers
Beat thick on his forehead in vain.

With his poncho wrapped gloomily round him,
He mounted the dizzying road,
And the chasms and steeps of the headland
Were slippery and wet, as he trod:
Wild swept the wind of the ocean,
Rolling the fog from afar,
When near him a mule-bell came tinkling,
Midway on the Paso del Mar.

"Back!" shouted Bernal, full fiercely,
And "Back!" shouted Pablo, in wrath,
As his mule halted, startled and shrinking,
On the perilous line of the path.
The roar of devouring surges
Came up from the breakers' hoarse war;
And "Back, or you perish!" cried Bernal,
"I turn not on Paso del Mar!"

The gray mule stood firm as the headland:
He clutched at the jingling rein,
When Pablo rose up in his saddle
And smote till he dropped it again.
A wild oath of passion swore Bernal,
And brandished his dagger, still red,
While fiercely stout Pablo leaned forward,
And fought o'er his trusty mule's head.

They fought till the black wall below them
Shone red through the misty blast;
Stout Pablo then struck, leaning farther,
The broad breast of Bernal at last.
And, frenzied with pain, the swart herdsman
Closed on him with terrible strength,
And jerked him, despite of his struggles,
Down from the saddle at length.

They grappled with desperate madness,
On the slippery edge of the wall;
They swayed on the brink, and together
Reeled out to the rush of the fall.
A cry of the wildest death-anguish
Rang faint through the mist afar,
And the riderless mule went homeward
From the fight of the Paso del Mar.

1848.

THE PINE FOREST OF MONTEREY

What point of Time, unchronicled, and dim
As yon gray mist that canopies your heads,
Took from the greedy wave and gave the sun
Your dwelling-place, ye gaunt and hoary Pines?
When, from the barren bosoms of the hills,
With scanty nurture, did ye slowly climb,
Of these remote and latest-fashioned shores
The first-born forest? Titans gnarled and rough,
Such as from out subsiding Chaos grew

To clothe the cold loins of the savage earth,
What fresh commixture of the elements,
What earliest thrill of life, the stub-born soil
Slow-mastering, engendered ye to give
The hills a mantle and the wind a voice?
Along the shore ye lift your rugged arms,
Blackened with many fires, and with hoarse chant, —
Unlike the fibrous lute your co-mates touch
In elder regions, — fill the awful stops
Between the crashing cataracts of the surf.
Have ye no tongue, in all your sea of sound,
To syllable the secret, — no still voice
To give your airy myths a shadowy form,
And make us of lost centuries of lore
The rich inheritors?

The sea-winds pluck
Your mossy beards, and gathering as they sweep,
Vex your high heads, and with your sinewy arms
Grapple and toil in vain. A deeper roar,
Sullen and cold, and rousing into spells
Of stormy volume, is your sole reply.
Anchored in firm-set rock, ye ride the blast,
And from the promontory's utmost verge
Make signal o'er the waters. So ye stood,
When, like a star, behind the lonely sea,
Far shone the white speck of Grijalva's sail;
And when, through driving fog, the breaker's sound
Frighted Otondo's men, your spicy breath
Played as in welcome round their rusty helms,
And backward from its staff shook out the folds
Of Spain's emblazoned banner.

Ancient Pines,
Ye bear no record of the years of man.
Spring is your sole historian, — Spring, that paints
These savage shores with hues of Paradise,
That decks your branches with a fresher green,
And through your lonely, far cañadas pours
Her floods of bloom, rivers of opal dye
That wander down to lakes and widening seas
Of blossom and of fragrance, — laughing Spring,
That with her wanton blood refills your veins,
And weds ye to your juicy youth again
With a new ring, the while your rifted bark
Drops odorous tears. Your knotty fibres yield
To the light touch of her unfailing pen,
As freely as the lupin's violet cup.
Ye keep, close-locked, the memories of her stay
As in their shells the avelonès keep
Morn's rosy flush and moonlight's pearly glow.
The wild northwest, that from Alaska sweeps,
To drown Point Lobos with the icy scud
And white sea-foam, may rend your boughs and leave
Their blasted antlers tossing in the gale;
Your steadfast hearts are mailed against the shock,
And on their annual tablets naught inscribe
Of such rude visitation. Ye are still
The simple children of a guiltless soil,
And in your natures show the sturdy grain
That passion cannot jar, nor force relax,
Nor aught but sweet and kindly airs compel
To gentler mood. No disappointed heart
Has sighed its bitterness beneath your shade;
No angry spirit ever came to make

Your silence its confessional; no voice,
Grown harsh in Crime's great market-place, the world,
Tainted with blasphemy your evening hush
And aromatic air. The deer alone, —
The ambushed hunter that brings down the deer, —
The fisher wandering on the misty shore
To watch sea-lions wallow in the flood, —
The shout, the sound of hoofs that chase and fly,
When swift vaqueros, dashing through the herds,
Ride down the angry bull, — perchance, the song
Some Indian heired of long-forgotten sires, —
Disturb your solemn chorus.

Stately Pines,
But few more years around the promontory
Your chant will meet the thunders of the sea.
No more, a barrier to the encroaching sand,
Against the surf ye 'll stretch defiant arm,
Though with its onset and besieging shock
Your firm knees tremble. Never more the wind
Shall pipe shrill music through your mossy beards,
Nor sunset's yellow blaze athwart your heads
Crown all the hills with gold. Your race is past:
The mystic cycle, whose unnoted birth
Coeval was with yours, has run its sands,
And other footsteps from these changing shores
Frighten its haunting Spirit. Men will come
To vex your quiet with the din of toil;
The smoky volumes of the forge will stain
This pure, sweet air; loud keels will ride the sea,
Dashing its glittering sapphire into foam;
Through all her green cañadas Spring will seek
Her lavish blooms in vain, and clasping ye,
O mournful Pines, within her glowing arms,
Will weep soft rains to find ye fallen low.
Fall, therefore, yielding to the fiat! Fall,
Ere the maturing soil, whose first dull life
Fed your belated germs, be rent and seamed!
Fall, like the chiefs ye sheltered, stern, unbent,
Your gray beards hiding memorable scars!
The winds will mourn ye, and the barren hills
Whose breast ye clothed; and when the pauses come
Between the crashing cataracts of the surf,
A funeral silence, terrible, profound,
Will make sad answer to the listening sea.

Monterey, 1849.

EL CANELO

I

Now saddle El Canelo! — the freshening wind of morn,
Down in the flowery vega, is stirring through the corn;
The thin smoke of the ranches grows red with coming day,
And the steed is fiercely stamping, in haste to be away.

II

My glossy-limbed Canelo, thy neck is curved in pride,
Thy slender ears pricked forward, thy nostril straining wide;
And as thy quick neigh greets me, and I catch thee by the mane,
I'm off with the winds of morning, — the chieftain of the plain!

III

I feel the swift air whirring, and see along our track,
From the flinty-paved sierra, the sparks go streaming back;

And I clutch my rifle closer, as we
sweep the dark defile,
Where the red guerillas ambush for
many a lonely mile.

IV

They reach not El Canelo; with the
swiftness of a dream
We've passed the bleak Nevada, and
San Fernando's stream;
But where, on sweeping gallop, my
bullet backward sped,
The keen-eyed mountain vultures will
wheel above the dead.

V

On! on, my brave Canelo! we've
dashed the sand and snow
From peaks upholding heaven, from
deserts far below, —
We've thundered through the forest,
while the crackling branches
rang,
And trooping elks, affrighted, from
lair and covert sprang.

VI

We've swum the swollen torrent, —
we've distanced in the race
The baying wolves of Pinos, that
panted with the chase;
And still thy mane streams backward,
at every thrilling bound,
And still thy measured hoof-stroke
beats with its morning sound!

VII

The seaward winds are wailing
through Santa Barbara's pines,
And like a sheathless sabre, the far
Pacific shines;
Hold to thy speed, my arrow! at
nightfall thou shalt lave
Thy hot and smoking haunches be
neath his silver wave!

VIII

My head upon thy shoulder, along the
sloping sand
We'll sleep as trusty brothers, from
out the mountain land;
The pines will sound in answer to the
surges on the shore,
And in our dreams, Canelo, we'll
make the journey o'er.

1848.

THE SUMMER CAMP

Here slacken rein; here let the dusty
mules
Unsaddled graze! The shadows of
the oaks
Are on our brows, and through their
knotted boles
We see the blue round of the bound-
less plain
Vanish in glimmering heat: these
aged oaks,
The island speck that beckoned us afar
Over the burning level, — as we came,
Spreading to shore and cape, and
bays that ran
To leafy headlands, balanced on the
haze,
Faint and receding as a cloud in air.

The mules may roam unsaddled: we
will lie
Beneath the mighty trees, whose
shade like dew
Poured from the urns of Twilight,
dries the sweat
Of sunburnt brows, and on the heavy
lid
And heated eyeball sheds a balm, than
sleep
Far sweeter. We have done with
travel, — we
Are weary now, who never dreamed
of Rest,
For until now did never Rest unbar
Her palace-doors, nor until now our
ears
The silence drink, beyond all melodies
Of all imagined sound, that wraps her
realm.
Here, where the desolating centuries
Have left no mark; where noises
never came
From the far world of battle and of
toil;
Where God looks down and sends no
thunderbolt
To smite a human wrong, for all is
good,
She finds a refuge. We will dwell
with her.

No more of travel, where the flaming
sword
Of the great sun divides the heavens;
no more

"OF CAÑONS GROWN WITH PINE AND FOLDED DEEP" (Page 24)

Of climbing over jutty steeps that swim
In driving sea-mist, where the stunted tree
Slants inland, mimicking the stress of winds
When wind is none; of plain and steaming marsh
Where the dry bulrush crackles in the heat;
Of camps by starlight in the columned vault
Of sycamores, and the red, dancing fires
That build a leafy arch, efface and build,
And sink at last, to let the stars peep through;
Of cañons grown with pine and folded deep
In golden mountain-sides; of airy sweeps
Of mighty landscape, lying all alone
Like some deserted world. They tempt no more.
It is enough that such things were: too blest,
O comrades mine, to lie in Summer's arms,
Lodged in her Camp of Rest, we will not dream
That they may vex us more.

The sun goes down:
The dun mules wander idly: motionless
Beneath the stars, the heavy foliage lifts
Its rich, round masses, silent as a cloud
That sleeps at midday on a mountain peak.
All through the long, delicious night no stir
Is in the leaves; spangled with broken gleams,
Before the pining Moon, — that fain would drop
Into the lap of this deep quiet, — swerve
Eastward the shadows: Day comes on again.
Where is the life we led? Whither hath fled
The turbulent stream that brought us hither? How,
So full of sound, so lately dancing down
The mountains, turbid, fretted into foam, —
How has it slipped, with scarce a gurgling coil,
Into this calm transparence, noise or wind
Hath ruffled never? Ages past, perchance,
Such wild turmoil was ours, or did some Dream
Malign, that last night nestled in the oak,
Whisper our ears, when not a star could see?
Give o'er the fruitless doubt: we will not waste
One thought of rest, nor spill one radiant drop
From the full goblet of this summer balm.

Day after day the mellow sun slides o'er,
Night after night the mellow moon. The clouds
Are laid, enchanted: soft and bare, the heavens
Fold to their breast the dozing Earth that lies
In languor of deep bliss. At times a breath,
Remnant of gales far off, forgotten now,
Rustles the never-fading leaves, then drops
Affrighted into silence. Near a slough
Of dark, still water, in the early morn
The shy coyotas prowl, or trooping elk
From the close covert of the bulrush fields
Their dewy antlers toss: nor other sight,
Save when the falcon, poised on wheeling wings,
His bright eye on the burrowing coney, cuts
His arrowy plunge. Along the distant trail,
Dim with the heat, sometimes the miners go,
Bearded and rough, the swart Sonorians drive
Their laden asses, or vaqueros whirl

The lasso's coil and carol many a song,
Native to Spanish hills. As when we lie
On the soft brink of Sleep, not pillowed quite
To blest forgetfulness, some dim array
Of masking forms in long procession comes,
A sweet disturbance to the poppied sense,
That will not cease, but gently holds it back
From slumber's haven, so their figures pass,
With such disturbance cloud the blessèd calm,
And hold our beings, ready to slip forth
O'er unmolested seas, still rocking near
The coasts of Action.

Other dreams are ours,
Of shocks that were, or seemed; whereof our souls
Feel the subsiding lapse, as feels the sand
Of tropic island-shores the dying pulse
Of storms that racked the Northern sea. My Soul,
I do believe that thou hast toiled and striven,
And hoped and suffered wrong. I do believe
Great aims were thine, deep loves and fiery hates,
And though I may have lain a thousand years
Beneath these Oaks, the baffled trust of Youth,
Thy first keen sorrow, brings a gentle pang
To temper joy. Nor will the joy I drank
To wild intoxication, quit my heart:
It was no dream that still has power to droop
The soft-suffusing lid, and lift desire
Beyond this rapt repose. No dream, dear love!
For thou art with me in our Camp of Peace.

O Friend, whose history is writ in deeds
That make your life a marvel, come no gleams
Of past adventure, echoes of old storms,
And Battle's tingling hum of flying shot,
To touch your easy blood and tempt you o'er
The round of yon blue plain? Or have they lost,
Heroic days, the virtue which the heart
That did their best rejoicing, proved so high?
Back through the long, long cycles of our rest
Your memory travels: through this hush you hear
The Gila's dashing, feel the yawning jaws
Of black volcanic gorges close you in
On waste and awful tracts of wilderness,
Which other than the eagle's cry, or bleat
Of mountain-goat, hear not: the scorching sand
Eddies around the tracks your fainting mules
Leave in the desert: thorn and cactus pierce
Your bleeding limbs, and stiff with raging thirst
Your tongue forgets its office. Leave untried
That cruel trail, and leave the wintry hills
And leave the tossing sea! The Summer here
Builds us a tent of everlasting calm.

How shall we wholly sink our lives in thee,
Thrice-blessèd Deep? O many-natured Soul,
Chameleon-like, that, steeped in every phase
Of wide existence, tak'st the hue of each,
Here with the silent Oaks and azure Air
Incorporate grow! Here loosen one by one
Thy vexing memories, burdens of the Past,

Till all unrest be laid, and strong Desire
Sleeps on his nerveless arm. Content to find
In liberal Peace thy being's high result
And crown of aspiration, gather all
The dreams of sense, the reachings of the mind
For ampler issues and dominion vain,
To fold them on her bosom, happier there
Than in exultant action: as a child
Forgets his meadow butterflies and flowers,
Upon his mother's breast.

It may not be.
Not in this Camp, in these enchanted Trees,
But in ourselves, must lodge the calm we seek,
Ere we can fix it here. We cannot take
From outward nature power to snap the curse
Which clothed our birth; and though 't were easier
This hour to die than yield the blessèd cup
Wherefrom our hearts divinest comfort draw,
It clothes us yet, and yet shall drive us forth
To breast the world. Then come: we will not bide
To tempt a ruin to this paradise,
Fulfilling Destiny. A mighty wind
Would gather on the plain, a cloud arise
To blot the sky, with thunder in its heart,
And the black column of the whirlwind spin
Out of the cloud, straight downward to this grove,
Take by their heads the shuddering trees, and wrench
With fearful clamor, limb from limb, till Rest
Should flee forever. Rather set at once
Our faces towards the noisy world again,
And gird our loins for action. Let us go!

1851.

THE BISON TRACK

I

STRIKE the tent! the sun has risen; not a vapor streaks the dawn,
And the frosted prairie brightens to the westward, far and wan:
Prime afresh the trusty rifle, — sharpen well the hunting spear —
For the frozen sod is trembling, and a noise of hoofs I hear!

II

Fiercely stamp the tethered horses, as they snuff the morning's fire;
Their impatient heads are tossing, and they neigh with keen desire.
Strike the tent! the saddles wait us, — let the bridle-reins be slack,
For the prairie's distant thunder has betrayed the bison's track.

III

See! a dusky line approaches: hark, the onward-surging roar,
Like the din of wintry breakers on a sounding wall of shore!
Dust and sand behind them whirling, snort the foremost of the van,
And their stubborn horns are clashing through the crowded caravan.

IV

Now the storm is down upon us: let the maddened horses go!
We shall ride the living whirlwind, though a hundred leagues it blow!
Though the cloudy manes should thicken, and the red eyes' angry glare
Lighten round us as we gallop through the sand and rushing air!

V

Myriad hoofs will scar the prairie, in our wild, resistless race,
And a sound, like mighty waters, thunder down the desert space:
Yet the rein may not be tightened, nor the rider's eye look back —
Death to him whose speed should slacken, on the maddened bison's track!

VI

Now the trampling herds are threaded, and the chase is close and warm
For the giant bull that gallops in the edges of the storm:
Swiftly hurl the whizzing lasso, — swing your rifles as we run:
See! the dust is red behind him, — shout, my comrades, he is won!

VII

Look not on him as he staggers, — 't is the last shot he will need!
More shall fall, among his fellows, ere we run the mad stampede, —
Ere we stem the brinded breakers, while the wolves, a hungry pack,
Howl around each grim-eyed carcass, on the bloody Bison Track!

1848.

ROMANCES

1849–1851

MON-DA-MIN

OR, THE ROMANCE OF MAIZE

I

Long ere the shores of green America
Were touched by men of Norse and Saxon blood,
What time the Continent in silence lay,
A solemn realm of forest and of flood,
Where Nature wantoned wild in zones immense,
Unconscious of her own magnificence;

II

Then to the savage race, who knew no world
Beyond the hunter's lodge, the council-fire,
The clouds of grosser sense were sometimes furled,
And spirits came to answer their desire, —
The spirits of the race, grotesque and shy;
Exaggerated powers of earth and sky.

III

For Gods resemble whom they govern: they,
The fathers of the soil, may not outgrow
The children's vision. In that earlier day,
They stooped the race familiarly to know;
From Heaven's blue prairies they descended then,
And took the shapes and shared the lives of men.

IV

A chief there was, who in the frequent stress
Of want, yet in contentment, lived his days;
His lodge was built within the wilderness
Of Huron, clasping those transparent bays,
Those deeps of unimagined crystal, where
The bark canoe seems hung in middle air.

V

There, from the lake and from the uncertain chase
With patient heart his sustenance he drew;
And he was glad to see, in that wild place,
The sons and daughters that around him grew,
Although more scant they made his scanty store,
And in the winter moons his need was sore.

VI

The eldest was a boy, a silent lad,
Who wore a look of wisdom from his birth:

Such beauty, both of form and face, he had,
As until then was never known on earth:
And so he was (his soul so bright and far!)
Osséo named, — Son of the Evening Star.

VII

This boy by nature was companionless:
His soul drew nurture only when it sucked
The savage dugs of Fable; he could guess
The knowledge other minds but slowly plucked
From out the heart of things; to him, as well
As to his Gods, all things were possible.

VIII

The heroes of that shapeless faith of his
Took life from him: when gusts of powdery snow
Whirled round the lodge, he saw Paup-puckewiss
Floundering amid the drifts, and he would go
Climbing the hills, while sunset faded wan,
To seek the feathers of the Rosy Swan.

IX

He knew the lord of serpent and of beast,
The crafty Incarnation of the North;
He knew, when airs grew warm and buds increased,
The sky was pierced, the Summer issued forth,
And when a cloud concealed some mountain's crest
The Bird of Thunder brooded on his nest.

X

Through Huron's mists he saw the enchanted boat
Of old Mishosha to his island go,
And oft he watched, if on the waves might float,
As once, the Fiery Plume of Wassamo;
And when the moonrise flooded coast and bay,
He climbed the headland, stretching far away;

XI

For there — so ran the legend — nightly came
The small Puck-wudjees, ignorant of harm:
The friends of Man, in many a sportive game
The nimble elves consoled them for the charm
Which kept them exiled from their homes afar, —
The silver lodges of a twilight star.

XII

So grew Osséo, as a lonely pine,
That knows the secret of the wandering breeze,
And ever sings its canticles divine,
Uncomprehended by the other trees:
And now the time drew nigh, when he began
The solemn fast whose issue proves the man.

XIII

His father built a lodge the wood within,
Where he the appointed space should duly bide,
Till such propitious time as he had been
By faith prepared, by fasting purified,
And in mysterious dreams allowed to see
What God the guardian of his life would be.

XIV

The anxious crisis of the Spring was past,
And warmth was master o'er the lingering cold.
The alder's catkins dropped; the maple cast
His crimson bloom, the willow's downy gold
Blew wide, and softer than a squirrel's ear
The white oak's foxy leaves began appear.

XV

There was a motion in the soil. A sound
Lighter than falling seeds, shook out of flowers,
Exhaled where dead leaves, sodden on the ground,
Repressed the eager grass; and there for hours
Osséo lay, and vainly strove to bring
Into his mind the miracle of Spring.

XVI

The wood-birds knew it, and their voices rang
Around his lodge; with many a dart and whir
Of saucy joy, the shrewish catbird sang
Full-throated, and he heard the kingfisher,
Who from his God escaped with rumpled crest,
And the white medal hanging on his breast.

XVII

The aquilegia sprinkled on the rocks
A scarlet rain; the yellow violet
Sat in the chariot of its leaves; the phlox
Held spikes of purple flame in meadows wet,
And all the streams with vernal-scented reed
Were fringed, and streaky bells of miskodeed.

XVIII

The boy went musing: What are these, that burst
The sod and grow, without the aid of man?
What father brought them food? what mother nursed
Them in her earthy lodge, till Spring began?
They cannot speak; they move but with the air;
Yet souls of evil or of good they bear.

XIX

How are they made, that some with wholesome juice
Delight the tongue, and some are charged with death?
If spirits them inhabit, they can loose
Their shape sometimes, and talk with human breath:
Would that in dreams one such would come to me,
And thence my teacher and my guardian be!

XX

So, when more languid with his fast, the boy
Kept to his lodge, he pondered much thereon,
And other memories gave his mind employ;
Memories of winters when the moose were gone, —
When tales of Manabozo failed to melt
The hunger-pang his pining brothers felt.

XXI

He thought: The Mighty Spirit knows all things,
Is master over all. Could He not choose
Design his children food to ease the stings
Of hunger, when the lake and wood refuse?
If He will bless me with the knowledge, I
Will for my brothers fast until I die.

XXII

Four days were sped since he had tasted meat;
Too faint he was to wander any more,
When from the open sky, that, blue and sweet,
Looked in upon him through the lodge's door,
With quiet gladness he beheld a fair
Celestial Shape descending through the air.

XXIII

He fell serenely, as a wingèd seed
Detached in summer from the maple bough;
His glittering clothes unruffled by the speed,
The tufted plumes unshaken on his brow:

Bright, wonderful, he came without a sound,
And like a burst of sunshine struck the ground.

XXIV

So light he stood, so tall and straight of limb,
So fair the heavenly freshness of his face,
With beating heart Osséo looked at him,
For now a God had visited the place.
More brave a God his dreams had never seen:
The stranger's garments were a shining green.

XXV

Sheathing his limbs in many a stately fold,
That, parting on his breast, allowed the eye
To note beneath, his vest of scaly gold,
Whereon the drops of slaughter, scarcely dry,
Disclosed their blushing stain: his shoulders fair
Gave to the wind long tufts of silky hair.

XXVI

The plumy crest, that high and beautiful
Above his head its branching tassels hung,
Shook down a golden dust, while, fixing full
His eyes upon the boy, he loosed his tongue.
Deep in his soul Osséo did rejoice
To hear the reedy music of his voice:

XXVII

"By the Great Spirit I am hither sent,
He knows the wishes whereupon you feed, —
The soul, that, on your brothers' good intent,
Would sink ambition to relieve their need:
This thing is grateful to the Master's eye,
Nor will His wisdom what you seek deny.

XXVIII

"But blessings are not free; they do not fall
In listless hands; by toil the soul must prove
Its steadfast purpose master over all,
Before their wings in pomp of coming move:
Here, wrestling with me, must you overcome,
In me, the secret, — else, my lips are dumb."

XXIX

No match for his, Osséo's limbs appeared,
Weak with the fast; and yet in soul he grew
Composed and resolute, by accents cheered,
That spake in light what he but darkly knew.
He rose, unto the issue nerved; he sent
Into his arms the hope of the event.

XXX

The shining stranger wrestled long and hard,
When, disengaging weary limbs, he said:
"It is enough; with no unkind regard
The Master's eye your toil hath visited.
He bids me cease; to-day let strife remain;
But on the morrow I will come again."

XXXI

And on the morrow came he as before,
Dropping serenely down the deep-blue air:
More weak and languid was the boy, yet more
Courageous he, that crowning test to bear.
His soul so wrought in every fainting limb,
It seemed the cruel fast had strengthened him.

XXXII

Again they grappled, and their sinews wrung
In desperate emulation; and again

Came words of comfort from the stranger's tongue
When they had ceased. He scaled the heavenly plain,
His tall, bright stature lessening as he rose,
Till lost amid the infinite repose.

XXXIII

On the third day descending as before
His raiment's gleam surprised the silent sky;
And weaker still the poor boy felt, yet more
Courageous he, and resolute to die,
So he might first the promised good embrace,
And leave a blessing unto all his race.

XXXIV

This time with intertwining limbs they strove;
The God's green mantle shook in every fold,
And o'er Osséo's heated forehead drove
His silky hair, his tassel's dusty gold,
Till, spent and breathless, he at last forbore,
And sat to rest beside the lodge's door.

XXXV

"My friend," he said, "the issue now is plain;
Who wrestles in his soul must victor be;
Who bids his life in payment shall attain
The end he seeks, — and you will vanquish me.
Then, these commands fulfilling, you shall win
What the Great Spirit gives in Mon-da-Min.

XXXVI

"When I am dead, strip off this green array,
And pluck the tassels from my shrivelled hair;
Then bury me where summer rains shall play
Above my breast, and sunshine linger there.
Remove the matted sod; for I would have
The earth lie lightly, softly on my grave.

XXXVII

"And tend the place, lest any noxious weed
Through the sweet soil should strike its bitter root;
Nor let the blossoms of the forest breed,
Nor the wild grass in green luxuriance shoot;
But when the earth is dry and blistered, fold
Thereon the fresh and dainty-smelling mould.

XXXVIII

"The clamoring crow, the blackbird swarms that make
The meadow trees their hive, must come not near:
Scare thence all hurtful things; nor quite forsake
Your careful watch until the woods appear
With crimson blotches deeply dashed and crossed, —
Sign of the fatal pestilence of Frost.

XXXIX

"This done, the secret, into knowledge grown,
Is yours forevermore." With that, he took
The yielding air. Osséo, left alone,
Followed his flight with hope-enraptured look.
The pains of hunger fled; a happy flame
Danced in his heart until the trial came.

XL

It happened so, as Mon-da-Min foretold;
Osséo's soul, at every wreathing twist
Of palpitating muscle, grew more bold,
And from the limbs of his antagonist
Celestial vigor to his own he drew,
Till with one mighty heave he overthrew.

XLI

Then from the body, beautiful and cold,
He stripped the shining clothes; but on his breast
He left the vest, engrained with blushing gold,
And covered him in decent burial-rest.
At sunset to his father's lodge he passed,
And soothed with meat the anguish of his fast.

XLII

Naught did he speak of all that he had done,
But day by day in secrecy he sought
An opening in the forest, where the sun
Warmed the new grave: so tenderly he wrought,
So lightly heaped the mould, so carefully
Kept all the place from choking herbage free,

XLIII

That in a little while a folded plume
Pushed timidly the covering soil aside,
And, fed by fattening rains, took broader room,
Until it grew a stalk, and rustled wide
Its leafy garments, lifting in the air
Its tasselled top, and knots of silky hair.

XLIV

Osséo marvelled to behold his friend
In this fair plant; the secret of the Spring
Was his at length; and till the Summer's end
He guarded him from every harmful thing.
He scared the cloud of blackbirds, wheeling low;
His arrow pierced the reconnoitring crow.

XLV

Now came the brilliant mornings, kindling all
The woody hills with pinnacles of fire;
The gum's ensanguined leaves began to fall,
The buckeye blazed in prodigal attire,
And frosty vapors left the lake at night
To string the prairie grass with spangles white.

XLVI

One day, from long and unsuccessful chase
The chief returned. Osséo through the wood
In silence led him to the guarded place,
Where now the plant in golden ripeness stood.
"Behold, my father!" he exclaimed, "our friend,
Whom the Great Spirit unto me did send,

XLVII

"Then, when I fasted, and my prayer He knew,
That He would save my brothers from their want;
For this, His messenger I overthrew,
And from his grave was born this glorious plant.
'T is Mon-da-Min: his sheathing husks enclose
Food for my brothers in the time of snows.

XLVIII

"I leave you now, my father! Here befits
Me longer not to dwell. My pathway lies
To where the West-wind on the mountain sits,
And the Red Swan beyond the sunset flies:
There may superior wisdom be in store."
And so he went, and he returned no more.

XLIX

But Mon-da-Min remained, and still remains;
His children cover all the boundless land,
And the warm sun and frequent mellow rains
Shape the tall stalks and make the leaves expand.

A mighty army they have grown : he drills
Their green battalions on the summer hills.

L

And when the silky hair hangs crisp and dead,
Then leave their rustling ranks the tasselled peers,
In broad encampment pitch their tents instead,
And garner up the ripe autumnal ears :
The annual storehouse of a nation's need,
From whose abundance all the world may feed.

1851.

HYLAS

Storm-wearied Argo slept upon the water.
No cloud was seen ; on blue and craggy Ida
The hot noon lay, and on the plain's enamel ;
Cool, in his bed, alone, the swift Scamander.
" Why should I haste ? " said young and rosy Hylas :
" The seas were rough, and long the way from Colchis.
Beneath the snow-white awning slumbers Jason,
Pillowed upon his tame Thessalian panther ;
The shields are piled, the listless oars suspended
On the black thwarts, and all the hairy bondsmen
Doze on the benches. They may wait for water,
Till I have bathed in mountain-born Scamander."

So said, unfilleting his purple chlamys,
And putting down his urn, he stood a moment,
Breathing the faint, warm odor of the blossoms
That spangled thick the lovely Dardan meadows.
Then, stooping lightly, loosened he his buskins,
And felt with shrinking feet the crispy verdure,
Naked, save one light robe that from his shoulder
Hung to his knee, the youthful flush revealing
Of warm, white limbs, half-nerved with coming manhood,
Yet fair and smooth with tenderness of beauty.
Now to the river's sandy marge advancing,
He dropped the robe, and raised his head exulting
In the clear sunshine, that with beam embracing
Held him against Apollo's glowing bosom.
For sacred to Latona's son is Beauty,
Sacred is Youth, the joy of youthful feeling.
A joy indeed, a living joy, was Hylas,
Whence Jove-begotten Hêraclês, the mighty,
To men though terrible, to him was gentle,
Smoothing his rugged nature into laughter
When the boy stole his club, or from his shoulders
Dragged the huge paws of the Nemæan lion.

The thick, brown locks, tossed backward from his forehead,
Fell soft about his temples ; manhood's blossom
Not yet had sprouted on his chin, but freshly
Curved the fair cheek, and full the red lips, parting,
Like a loose bow, that just has launched its arrow.
His large blue eyes, with joy dilate and beamy,
Were clear as the unshadowed Grecian heaven ;
Dewy and sleek his dimpled shoulders rounded
To the white arms and whiter breast between them.
Downward, the supple lines had less of softness :
His back was like a god's ; his loins were moulded

As if some pulse of power began to waken ;
The springy fulness of his thighs, outswerving,
Sloped to his knee, and, lightly dropping downward,
Drew the curved lines that breathe, in rest, of motion.

He saw his glorious limbs reversely mirrored
In the still wave, and stretched his foot to press it
On the smooth sole that answered at the surface :
Alas! the shape dissolved in glimmering fragments.
Then, timidly at first, he dipped, and catching
Quick breath, with tingling shudder, as the waters
Swirled round his thighs, and deeper, slowly deeper,
Till on his breast the River's cheek was pillowed,
And deeper still, till every shoreward ripple
Talked in his ear, and like a cygnet's bosom
His white, round shoulder shed the dripping crystal.
There, as he floated, with a rapturous motion,
The lucid coolness folding close around him,
The lily-cradling ripples murmured, "Hylas!"
He shook from off his ears the hyacinthine
Curls, that had lain unwet upon the water,
And still the ripples murmured, "Hylas! Hylas!"
He thought : "The voices are but earborn music.
Pan dwells not here, and Echo still is calling
From some high cliff that tops a Thracian valley :
So long mine ears, on tumbling Hellespontus,
Have heard the sea waves hammer Argo's forehead,
That I misdeem the fluting of this current
For some lost nymph — " Again the murmur, "Hylas!"
And with the sound a cold, smooth arm around him
Slid like a wave, and down the clear, green darkness
Glimmered on either side a shining bosom, —
Glimmered, uprising slow ; and ever closer
Wound the cold arms, till, climbing to his shoulders,
Their cheeks lay nestled, while the purple tangles
Their loose hair made, in silken mesh enwound him.
Their eyes of clear, pale emerald then uplifting,
They kissed his neck with lips of humid coral,
And once again there came a murmur, "Hylas!
O, come with us! O, follow where we wander
Deep down beneath the green, translucent ceiling, —
Where on the sandy bed of old Scamander
With cool white buds we braid our purple tresses,
Lulled by the bubbling waves around us stealing!
Thou fair Greek boy, O, come with us! O, follow
Where thou no more shalt hear Propontis riot,
But by our arms be lapped in endless quiet,
Within the glimmering caves of Ocean hollow!
We have no love; alone, of all the Immortals,
We have no love. O, love us, we who press thee
With faithful arms, though cold, — whose lips caress thee, —
Who hold thy beauty prisoned! Love us, Hylas!"

The boy grew chill to feel their twining pressure
Lock round his limbs, and bear him, vainly striving,
Down from the noonday brightness.
"Leave me, Naiads!

Leave me!" he cried; "the day to me is dearer
Than all your caves deep-sphered in Ocean's quiet.
I am but mortal, seek but mortal pleasure:
I would not change this flexile, warm existence,
Though swept by storms, and shocked by Jove's dread thunder,
To be a king beneath the dark-green waters."
Still moaned the humid lips, between their kisses,
"We have no love. O, love us, we who love thee!"
And came in answer, thus, the words of Hylas:
"My love is mortal. For the Argive maidens
I keep the kisses which your lips would ravish.
Unlock your cold white arms, — take from my shoulder
The tangled swell of your bewildering tresses.
Let me return: the wind comes down from Ida,
And soon the galley, stirring from her slumber,
Will fret to ride where Pelion's twilight shadow
Falls o'er the towers of Jason's sea-girt city.
I am not yours, — I cannot braid the lilies
In your wet hair, nor on your argent bosoms
Close my drowsed eyes to hear your rippling voices.
Hateful to me your sweet, cold, crystal being, —
Your world of watery quiet. Help, Apollo!
For I am thine: thy fire, thy beam, thy music,
Dance in my heart and flood my sense with rapture!
The joy, the warmth and passion now awaken,
Promised by thee, but erewhile calmly sleeping.
O, leave me, Naiads! loose your chill embraces,
Or I shall die, for mortal maidens pining."
But still with unrelenting arms they bound him,
And still, accordant, flowed their watery voices:
"We have thee now, — we hold thy beauty prisoned;
O, come with us beneath the emerald waters!
We have no love: we have thee, rosy Hylas.
O, love us, who shall nevermore release thee:
Love us, whose milky arms will be thy cradle
Far down on the untroubled sands of ocean,
Where now we bear thee, clasped in our embraces."
And slowly, slowly sank the amorous Naiads;
The boy's blue eyes, upturned, looked through the water,
Pleading for help; but Heaven's immortal Archer
Was swathed in cloud. The ripples hid his forehead,
And last, the thick, bright curls a moment floated,
So warm and silky that the stream upbore them,
Closing reluctant, as he sank forever.

The sunset died behind the crags of Imbros.
Argo was tugging at her chain; for freshly
Blew the swift breeze, and leaped the restless billows.
The voice of Jason roused the dozing sailors,
And up the mast was heaved the snowy canvas.
But mighty Hêraclês, the Jove-begotten,
Unmindful stood, beside the cool Scamander,
Leaning upon his club. A purple chlamys
Tossed o'er an urn was all that lay before him:
And when he called, expectant, "Hylas! Hylas!"
The empty echoes made him answer, — "Hylas!"

1850.

KUBLEH

A STORY OF THE ASSYRIAN DESERT

THE black-eyed children of the Desert drove
Their flocks together at the set of sun.
The tents were pitched; the weary camels bent
Their suppliant necks, and knelt upon the sand;
The hunters quartered by the kindled fires
The wild boars of the Tigris they had slain,
And all the stir and sound of evening ran
Throughout the Shammar camp. The dewy air
Bore its full burden of confused delight
Across the flowery plain; and while, afar,
The snows of Koordish Mountains in the ray
Flashed roseate amber, Nimroud's ancient mound
Rose broad and black against the burning West.
The shadows deepened, and the stars came out,
Sparkling in violet ether; one by one
Glimmered the ruddy camp-fires on the plain,
And shapes of steed and horseman moved among
The dusky tents, with shout and jostling cry,
And neigh and restless prancing. Children ran
To hold the thongs, while every rider drove
His quivering spear in the earth, and by his door
Tethered the horse he loved. In midst of all
Stood Shammeriyah, whom they dared not touch, —
The foal of wondrous Kubleh, to the Shekh
A dearer wealth than all his Georgian girls.

But when their meal was o'er, — when the red fires
Blazed brighter, and the dogs no longer bayed, —
When Shammar hunters with the boys sat down
To cleanse their bloody knives, came Alimâr,
The poet of the tribe, whose songs of love
Are sweeter than Bassora's nightingales, —
Whose songs of war can fire the Arab blood
Like war itself: who knows not Alimâr?
Then asked the men, "O Poet, sing of Kubleh!"
And boys laid down the burnished knives and said,
"Tell us of Kubleh, whom we never saw, —
Of wondrous Kubleh!" Closer drew the group,
With eager eyes, about the flickering fire,
While Alimâr, beneath the Assyrian stars,
Sang to the listening Arabs:

"God is great!
O Arabs! never since Mohammed rode
The sands of Beder, and by Mecca's gate
That wingèd steed bestrode, whose mane of fire
Blazed up the zenith, when, by Allah called,
He bore the Prophet to the walls of Heaven,
Was like to Kubleh, Sofuk's wondrous mare:
Not all the milk-white barbs, whose hoofs dashed flame,
In Baghdad's stables, from the marble floor, —
Who, swathed in purple housings, pranced in state
The gay bazaars, by great Al-Raschid backed:
Not the wild charger of Mongolian breed
That went o'er half the world with Tamerlane:
Nor yet those flying coursers, long ago
From Ormuz brought by swarthy Indian grooms
To Persia's kings, — the foals of sacred mares,
Sired by the fiery stallions of the sea!

"Who ever told, in all the Desert Land,
The many deeds of Kubleh? Who can tell
Whence came she? whence her like shall come again?
O Arabs! sweet as tales of Scheherazade
Heard in the camp, when javelin shafts are tried
On the hot eve of battle, are the words
That tell the marvels of her history.

"Far in the Southern sands, the hunters say,
Did Sofuk find her, by a lonely palm.
The well had dried; her fierce, impatient eye
Glared red and sunken, and her slight young limbs
Were lean with thirst. He checked his camel's pace,
And, while it knelt, untied the water-skin,
And when the wild mare drank, she followed him.
Thence none but Sofuk might the saddle gird
Upon her back, or clasp the brazen gear
About her shining head, that brooked no curb
From even him; for she, alike, was royal.

"Her form was lighter, in its shifting grace,
Than some impassioned almeh's, when the dance
Unbinds her scarf, and golden anklets gleam,
Through floating drapery, on the buoyant air.
Her light, free head was ever held aloft;
Between her slender and transparent ears
The silken forelock tossed; her nostril's arch,
Thin-blown, in proud and pliant beauty spread
Snuffing the desert winds. Her glossy neck
Curved to the shoulder like an eagle's wing,
And all her matchless lines of flank and limb
Seemed fashioned from the flying shapes of air.
When sounds of warlike preparation rang
From tent to tent, her keen and restless eye
Shone blood-red as a ruby, and her neigh
Rang wild and sharp above the clash of spears.

"The tribes of Tigris and the Desert knew her:
Sofuk before the Shammar bands she bore
To meet the dread Jebours, who waited not
To bid her welcome; and the savage Koord,
Chased from his bold irruption on the plain,
Has seen her hoof-prints in his mountain snow.
Lithe as the dark-eyed Syrian gazelle,
O'er ledge, and chasm, and barren steep amid
The Sinjar-hills, she ran the wild ass down.
Through many a battle's thickest brunt she stormed,
Reeking with sweat and dust, and fetlock deep
In curdling gore. When hot and lurid haze
Stifled the crimson sun, she swept before
The whirling sand-spout, till her gusty mane
Flared in its vortex, while the camels lay
Groaning and helpless on the fiery waste.

"The tribes of Taurus and the Caspian knew her:
The Georgian chiefs have heard her trumpet neigh
Before the walls of Tiflis; pines that grow
On ancient Caucasus have harbored her,
Sleeping by Sofuk in their spicy gloom.

The surf of Trebizond has bathed her flanks,
When from the shore she saw the white-sailed bark
That brought him home from Stamboul. Never yet,
O Arabs! never yet was like to Kubleh!

"And Sofuk loved her. She was more to him
Than all his snowy-bosomed odalisques.
For many years she stood beside his tent,
The glory of the tribe.

"At last she died, —
Died, while the fire was yet in all her limbs, —
Died for the life of Sofuk, whom she loved.
The base Jebours, — on whom be Allah's curse! —
Came on his path, when far from any camp,
And would have slain him, but that Kubleh sprang
Against the javelin points, and bore them down,
And gained the open Desert. Wounded sore,
She urged her light limbs into maddening speed,
And made the wind a laggard. On and on
The red sand slid beneath her, and behind
Whirled in a swift and cloudy turbulence,
As when some star of Eblis, downward hurled
By Allah's bolt, sweeps with its burning hair
The waste of darkness. On and on the bleak,
Bare ridges rose before her, came, and passed,
And every flying leap with fresher blood
Her nostrils stained, till Sofuk's brow and breast
Were flecked with crimson foam. He would have turned
To save his treasure, though himself were lost,
But Kubleh fiercely snapped the brazen rein.
At last, when through her spent and quivering frame
The sharp throes ran, our clustering tents arose,
And with a neigh, whose shrill access of joy
O'ercame its agony, she stopped and fell.
The Shammar men came round her as she lay,
And Sofuk raised her head, and held it close
Against his breast. Her dull and glazing eye
Met his, and with a shuddering gasp she died.
Then like a child his bursting grief made way
In passionate tears, and with him all the tribe
Wept for the faithful mare.

"They dug her grave
Amid El-Hather's marbles, where she lies
Buried with ancient kings; and since that time
Was never seen, and will not be again,
O Arabs! though the world be doomed to live
As many moons as count the desert sands,
The like of glorious Kubleh. God is great!"

1849.

METEMPSYCHOSIS OF THE PINE

As when the haze of some wan moonlight makes
Familiar fields a land of mystery,
Where, chill and strange, a ghostly presence wakes
In flower, and bush, and tree, —

Another life, the life of Day o'erwhelms;
The Past from present consciousness takes hue,
And we remember vast and cloudy realms
Our feet have wandered through:

So, oft, some moonlight of the mind makes dumb
The stir of outer thought: wide open seems
The gate wherethrough strange sympathies have come,
The secret of our dreams;

The source of fine impressions, shooting deep
Below the failing plummet of the sense;
Which strike beyond all Time, and backward sweep
Through all intelligence.

We touch the lower life of beast and clod,
And the long process of the ages see
From blind old Chaos, ere the breath of God
Moved it to harmony.

All outward wisdom yields to that within,
Whereof nor creed nor canon holds the key;
We only feel that we have ever been,
And evermore shall be.

And thus I know, by memories unfurled
In rarer moods, and many a nameless sign,
That once in Time, and somewhere in the world,
I was a towering Pine,

Rooted upon a cape that overhung
The entrance to a mountain gorge whereon
The wintry shadow of a peak was flung,
Long after rise of sun.

Behind, the silent snows; and wide below,
The rounded hills made level, lessening down
To where a river washed with sluggish flow
A many-templed town.

There did I clutch the granite with firm feet,
There shake my boughs above the roaring gulf,
When mountain whirlwinds through the passes beat,
And howled the mountain wolf.

There did I louder sing than all the floods
Whirled in white foam above the precipice,
And the sharp sleet that stung the naked woods
Answer with sullen hiss:

But when the peaceful clouds rose white and high
On blandest airs that April skies could bring,
Through all my fibres thrilled the tender sigh,
The sweet unrest of Spring.

She, with warm fingers laced in mine, did melt
In fragrant balsam my reluctant blood;
And with a smart of keen delight I felt
The sap in every bud,

And tingled through my rough old bark, and fast
Pushed out the younger green, that smoothed my tones,
When last year's needles to the wind I cast,
And shed my scaly cones.

I held the eagle till the mountain mist
Rolled from the azure paths he came to soar,
And like a hunter, on my gnarled wrist
The dappled falcon bore.

Poised o'er the blue abyss, the morning lark
Sang, wheeling near in rapturous carouse;
And hart and hind, soft-pacing through the dark,
Slept underneath my boughs.

Down on the pasture-slopes the herdsman lay,
And for the flock his birchen trumpet blew;

There ruddy children tumbled in their play,
And lovers came to woo.

And once an army, crowned with triumph, came
Out of the hollow bosom of the gorge,
With mighty banners in the wind aflame,
Borne on a glittering surge

Of tossing spears, a flood that homeward rolled,
While cymbals timed their steps of victory,
And horn and clarion from their throats of gold
Sang with a savage glee.

I felt the mountain walls below me shake,
Vibrant with sound, and through my branches poured
The glorious gust: my song thereto did make
Magnificent accord.

Some blind harmonic instinct pierced the rind
Of that slow life which made me straight and high,
And I became a harp for every wind,
A voice for every sky;

When fierce autumnal gales began to blow,
Roaring all day in concert, hoarse and deep;
And then made silent with my weight of snow —
A spectre on the steep;

Filled with a whispering gush, like that which flows
Through organ-stops, when sank the sun's red disk
Beyond the city, and in blackness rose
Temple and obelisk;

Or breathing soft, as one who sighs in prayer,
Mysterious sounds of portent and of might,
What time I felt the wandering waves of air
Pulsating through the night.

And thus for centuries my rhythmic chant
Rolled down the gorge, or surged about the hill:
Gentle, or stern, or sad, or jubilant,
At every season's will.

No longer Memory whispers whence arose
The doom that tore me from my place of pride:
Whether the storms that load the peak with snows,
And start the mountain-slide,

Let fall a fiery bolt to smite my top,
Upwrenched my roots, and o'er the precipice
Hurled me, a dangling wreck, erelong to drop
Into the wild abyss;

Or whether hands of men, with scornful strength
And force from Nature's rugged armory lent,
Sawed through my heart and rolled my tumbling length
Sheer down the steep descent.

All sense departed, with the boughs I wore;
And though I moved with mighty gales at strife,
A mast upon the seas, I sang no more,
And music was my life.

Yet still that life awakens, brings again
Its airy anthems, resonant and long,
Till Earth and Sky, transfigured, fill my brain
With rhythmic sweeps of song.

Thence am I made a poet: thence are sprung
Those shadowy motions of the soul, that reach
Beyond all grasp of Art; — for which the tongue
Is ignorant of speech.

And if some wild, full-gathered harmony
Roll its unbroken music through my line,
There lives and murmurs, faintly though it be,
The Spirit of the Pine.

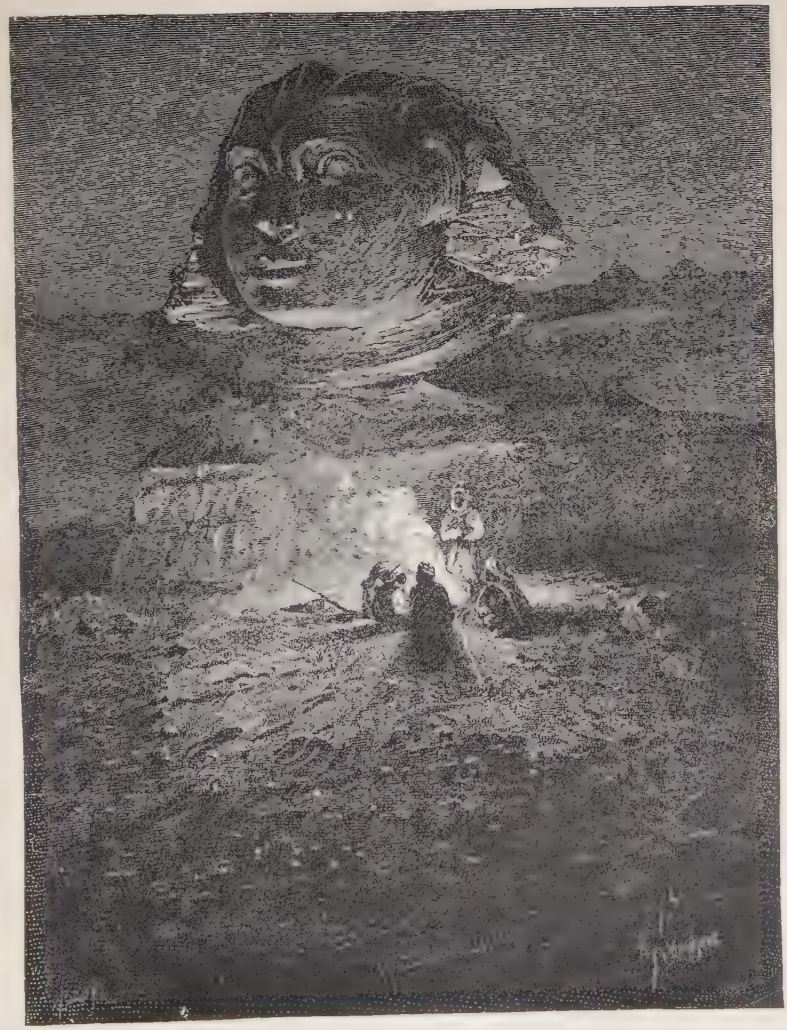
1851.

THE SOLDIER AND THE PARD

A SECOND deluge! Well, — no matter: here,
At least, is better shelter than the lean,
Sharp-elbowed oaks, — a dismal company!
That stood around us in the mountain road
When that cursed axle broke: a roof of thatch,
A fire of withered boughs, and best of all,
This ruddy wine of Languedoc, that warms
One through and through, from heart to finger-ends.
No better quarters for a stormy night
A soldier, like myself, could ask; and since
The rough Cevennes refuse to let us forth,
Why, fellow-travellers, if so you will,
I'll tell the story cut so rudely short
When both fore-wheels broke from the diligence,
Stocked in the rut, and pitched us all together:
I said, we fought beside the Pyramids;
And somehow, from the glow of this good wine,
And from the gloomy rain, that shuts one in
With his own self, — a sorry mate sometimes! —
The scene comes back like life. As then, I feel
The sun, and breathe the hot Egyptian air,
Hear Kleber, see the sabre of Dessaix
Flash at the column's front, and in the midst
Napoleon, upon his Barbary horse,
Calm, swarthy-browed, and wiser than the Sphinx
Whose granite lips guard Egypt's mystery.
Ha! what a rout! our cannon bellowed round
The Pyramids: the Mamelukes closed in,
And hand to hand like devils did we fight,
Rolled towards Sakkara in the smoke and sand.

For days we followed up the Nile. We pitched
Our tents in Memphis, pitched them on the site
Of Antinoë, and beside the cliffs
Of Aboufayda. Then we came anon
On Kenneh, ere the sorely-frightened Bey
Had time to pack his harem: nay, we took
His camels, not his wives: and so, from day
To day, past wrecks of temples half submerged
In sandy inundation, till we saw
Old noseless Memnon sitting on the plain,
Both hands upon his knees, and in the east
Karnak's propylon and its pillared court.
The sphinxes wondered — such as had a face —
To see us stumbling down their avenues;
But we kept silent. One may whistle round
Your Roman temples here at Nismes, or dance
Upon the Pont du Gard; — but, take my word,
Egyptian ruins are a serious thing:
You would not dare let fly a joke beside
The maimed colossi, though your very feet
Might catch between some mummied Pharaoh's ribs.

Dessaix was bent on chasing Mamelukes,
And so we rummaged tomb and catacomb,
Clambered the hills and watched the Desert's rim



THE SPHINX (Page 42)

For sight of horse. One day my company
(I was but ensign then) found far within
The sands, a two-days' journey from the Nile,
A round oasis, like a jewel set.
It was a grove of date-trees, clustering close
About a tiny spring, whose overflow
Trickled beyond their shade a little space,
And the insatiate Desert licked it up.
The fiery ride, the glare of afternoon
Had burned our faces, so we stopped to feel
The coolness and the shadow, like a bath
Of pure ambrosial lymph, receive our limbs
And sweeten every sense. Drowsed by the soft,
Delicious greenness and repose, I crept
Into a balmy nest of yielding shrubs,
And floated off to slumber on a cloud
Of rapturous sensation.

When I woke,
So deep had been the oblivion of that sleep,
That Adam, when he woke in Paradise,
Was not more blank of knowledge; he had felt
As heedlessly, the silence and the shade;
As ignorantly had raised his eyes and seen —
As, for a moment, I — what then I saw
With terror, freezing limb and voice like death,
When the slow sense, supplying one lost link,
Ran with electric fleetness through the chain
And showed me what I was, — no miracle,
But lost and left alone amid the waste,
Fronting a deadly Pard, that kept great eyes
Fixed steadily on mine. I could not move:
My heart beat slow and hard: I sat and gazed,
Without a wink, upon those jasper orbs,
Noting the while, with horrible detail,
Whereto my fascinated sight was bound,
Their tawny brilliance, and the spotted fell
That wrinkled round them, smoothly sloping back
And curving to the short and tufted ears.
I felt — and with a sort of fearful joy —
The beauty of the creature: 't was a pard,
Not such as one of those they show you caged
In Paris, — lean and scurvy beasts enough!
No: but a desert pard, superb and proud,
That would have died behind the cruel bars.

I think the creature had not looked on man.
For, as my brain grew cooler, I could see
Small sign of fierceness in her eyes, but chief,
Surprise and wonder. More and more entranced,
Her savage beauty warmed away the chill
Of deathlike terror at my heart: I stared
With kindling admiration, and there came
A gradual softness o'er the flinty light
Within her eyes; a shadow crept around
Their yellow disks, and something like a dawn
Of recognition of superior will,
Of brute affection, sympathy enslaved
By higher nature, then informed her face.
Thrilling in every nerve, I stretched my hand, —
She silent, moveless, — touched her velvet head,
And with a warm, sweet shiver in my blood,
Stroked down the ruffled hairs. She did not start;

But, in a moment's lapse, drew up one paw
And moved a step, — another, — till her breath
Came hot upon my face. She stopped: she rolled
A deep-voiced note of pleasure and of love,
And gathering up her spotted length, lay down,
Her head upon my lap, and forward thrust
One heavy-moulded paw across my knees,
The glittering talons sheathing tenderly.
Thus we, in that oasis all alone,
Sat when the sun went down: the Pard and I,
Caressing and caressed: and more of love
And more of confidence between us came,
I grateful for my safety, she alive
With the dumb pleasure of companionship,
Which touched with instincts of humanity
Her brutish nature. When I slept, at last,
My arm was on her neck.

The morrow brought
No rupture of the bond between us twain.
The creature loved me; she would bounding come,
Cat-like, to rub her great, smooth, yellow head
Against my knee, or with rough tongue would lick
The hand that stroked the velvet of her hide.
How beautiful she was! how lithe and free
The undulating motions of her frame!
How shone, like isles of tawny gold, her spots,
Mapped on the creamy white! And when she walked,
No princess, with the crown about her brows,
Looked so superbly royal. Ah, my friends,
Smile as you may, but I would give this life
With its fantastic pleasures — aye, even that
One leads in Paris — to be back again
In the red Desert with my splendid Pard.

That grove of date-trees was our home, our world,
A star of verdure in a sky of sand.
Without the feathery fringes of its shade
The naked Desert ran, its burning round
Sharp as a sword: the naked sky above,
Awful in its immensity, not shone
There only, where the sun supremely flamed,
But all its deep-blue walls were penetrant
With dazzling light. God reigned in Heaven and Earth,
An Everlasting Presence, and his care
Fed us, alike his children. From the trees
That shook down pulpy dates, and from the spring,
The quiet author of that happy grove,
My wants were sated; and when midnight came,
Then would the Pard steal softly from my side,
Take the unmeasured sand with flying leaps
And vanish in the dusk, returning soon
With a gazelle's light carcass in her jaws.
So passed the days, and each the other taught
Our simple language. She would come at call
Of the pet name I gave her, bound and sport
When so I bade, and she could read my face
Through all its changing moods, with better skill
Than many a Christian comrade. Pard and beast,
Though you may say she was, she had a soul.

But Sin will find the way to Paradise.
Erelong the sense of isolation fed

My mind with restless fancies. I began
To miss the life of camp, the march, the fight,
The soldier's emulation: youthful blood
Ran in my veins: the silence lost its charm,
And when the morning sunrise lighted up
The threshold of the Desert, I would gaze
With looks of bitter longing o'er the sand.
At last, I filled my soldier's sash with dates,
Drank deeply of the spring, and while the Pard
Roamed in the starlight for her forage took
A westward course. The grove already lay
A dusky speck — no more — when through the night
Came the forsaken creature's eager cry.
Into a sandy pit I crept, and heard
Her bounding on my track until she rolled
Down from the brink upon me. Then with cries
Of joy and of distress, the touching proof
Of the poor beast's affection, did she strive
To lift me— Pardon, friends! these foolish eyes
Must have their will: and had you seen her then,
In her mad gambols, as we homeward went,
Your hearts had softened too.

But I, possessed
By some vile devil of mistrust, became
More jealous and impatient. In my heart
I cursed the grove, and with suspicions wronged
The noble Pard. She keeps me here, I thought,
Deceived with false caresses, as a cat
Toys with the trembling mouse she straight devours.
Will she so gently fawn about my feet,
When the gazelles are gone? Will she crunch dates,
And drink the spring, whose only drink is blood?
Am I to ruin flattered, and by whom? —
Not even a man, a wily beast of prey.
Thus did the Devil whisper in mine ear,
Till those black thoughts were rooted in my heart
And made me cruel. So it chanced one day,
That as I watched a flock of birds that wheeled,
And dipped, and circled in the air, the Pard,
Moved by a freak of fond solicitude
To win my notice, closed her careful fangs
About my knee. Scarce knowing what I did,
In the blind impulse of suspicious fear,
I plunged, full home, my dagger in her neck.
God! could I but recall that blow! She loosed
Her hold, as softly as a lover quits
His mistress' lips, and with a single groan,
Full of reproach and sorrow, sank and died.
What had I done! Sure never on this earth
Did sharper grief so base a deed requite.
Its murderous fury gone, my heart was racked
With pangs of wild contrition, spent itself
In cries and tears, the while I called on God
To curse me for my sin. There lay the Pard,
Her splendid eyes all film, her blazoned fell
Smirched with her blood; and I, her murderer,
Less than a beast, had thus repaid her love.

Ah, friends! with all this guilty memory
My heart is sore: and little now remains

To tell you, but that afterwards — how long,
I could not know — our soldiers picked me up,
Wandering about the Desert, wild with grief
And sobbing like a child. My nerves have grown
To steel, in many battles; I can step
Without a shudder through the heaps of slain;
But never, never, till the day I die,
Prevent a woman's weakness when I think
Upon my desert Pard: and if a man
Deny this truth she taught me, to his face
I say he lies: a beast may have a soul.

1851.

ARIEL IN THE CLOVEN PINE

Now the frosty stars are gone:
I have watched them one by one,
Fading on the shores of Dawn.
Round and full the glorious sun
Walks with level step the spray,
Through his vestibule of Day,
While the wolves that late did howl
Slink to dens and coverts foul,
Guarded by the demon owl,
Who, last night, with mocking croon,
Wheeled athwart the chilly moon,
And with eyes that blankly glared
On my direful torment stared.

The lark is flickering in the light;
Still the nightingale doth sing; —
All the isle, alive with Spring,
Lies, a jewel of delight,
On the blue sea's heaving breast:
Not a breath from out the West,
But some balmy smell doth bring
From the sprouting myrtle buds,
Or from meadowy vales that lie
Like a green inverted sky,
Which the yellow cowslip stars,
And the bloomy almond woods,
Cloud-like, cross with roseate bars.
All is life that I can spy,
To the farthest sea and sky,
And my own the only pain
Within this ring of Tyrrhene main.

In the gnarled and cloven Pine
Where that hell-born hag did chain me
All this orb of cloudless shine,
All this youth in Nature's veins
Tingling with the season's wine,
With a sharper torment pain me.
Pansies in soft April rains
Fill their stalks with honeyed sap
Drawn from Earth's prolific lap;
But the sluggish blood she brings
To the tough Pine's hundred rings
Closer locks their cruel hold,
Closer draws the scaly bark
Round the crevice, damp and cold,
Where my useless wings I fold, —
Sealing me in iron dark.
By this coarse and alien state
Is my dainty essence wronged;
Finer senses that belonged
To my freedom, chafe at Fate,
Till the happier elves I hate,
Who in moonlight dances turn
Underneath the palmy fern,
Or in light and twinkling bands
Follow on with linkèd hands
To the Ocean's yellow sands.

Primrose-eyes each morning ope
In their cool, deep beds of grass;
Violets make the airs that pass
Telltales of their fragrant slope.
I can see them where they spring
Never brushed by fairy wing.
All those corners I can spy
In the island's solitude,
Where the dew is never dry,
Nor the miser bees intrude.
Cups of rarest hue are there,
Full of perfumed wine undrained, —
Mushroom banquets, ne'er profaned,
Canopied by maiden-hair.
Pearls I see upon the sands,
Never touched by other hands,
And the rainbow bubbles shine
On the ridged and frothy brine,
Tenantless of voyager
Till they burst in vacant air.
Oh, the songs that sung might be,
And the mazy dances woven,
Had that witch ne'er crossed the sea
And the Pine been never cloven!

Many years my direst pain
Has made the wave-rocked isle complain.
Winds, that from the Cyclades

Came, to blow in wanton riot
Round its shore's enchanted quiet,
Bore my wailings on the seas:
Sorrowing birds in Autumn went
Through the world with my lament.
Still the bitter fate is mine,
All delight unshared to see,
Smarting in the cloven Pine,
While I wait the tardy axe
Which, perchance, shall set me free
From the damned Witch Sycorax.

1849.

POEMS OF THE ORIENT

Da der West war durchgekostet,
Hat er nun den Ost entmostet.
RÜCKERT.

POEMS OF THE ORIENT

1851–1854

PROEM DEDICATORY

AN EPISTLE FROM MOUNT TMOLUS

TO RICHARD HENRY STODDARD

I

O Friend, were you but couched on Tmolus' side,
In the warm myrtles, in the golden air
Of the declining day, which half lays bare,
Half drapes, the silent mountains and the wide
Embosomed vale, that wanders to the sea;
And the far sea, with doubtful specks of sail,
And farthest isles, that slumber tranquilly
Beneath the Ionian autumn's violet veil; —
Were you but with me, little were the need
Of this imperfect artifice of rhyme,
Where the strong Fancy peals a broken chime
And the ripe brain but sheds abortive seed.
But I am solitary, and the curse,
Or blessing, which has clung to me from birth —
The torment and the ecstasy of verse —
Comes up to me from the illustrious earth
Of ancient Tmolus; and the very stones,
Reverberant, din the mellow air with tones
Which the sweet air remembers; and they blend
With fainter echoes, which the mountains fling
From far oracular caverns: so, my Friend,
I cannot choose but sing!

II

Unto mine eye, less plain the shepherds be,
Tending their browsing goats amid the broom,
Or the slow camels, travelling towards the sea,
Laden with bales from Baghdad's gaudy loom,
Or yon nomadic Turcomans, that go
Down from their summer pastures — than the twain
Immortals, who on Tmolus' thymy top
Sang, emulous, the rival strain!
Down the charmed air did light Apollo drop;
Great Pan ascended from the vales below.
I see them sitting in the silent glow;
I hear the alternating measures flow

From pipe and golden lyre; — the melody
Heard by the Gods between their nectar bowls,
Or when, from out the chambers of the sea,
Comes the triumphant Morning, and unrolls
A pathway for the sun; then, following swift,
The dædal harmonies of awful caves
Cleft in the hills, and forests that uplift
Their sea-like boom, in answer to the waves,
With many a lighter strain, that dances o'er
The wedded reeds, till Echo strives in vain
To follow:
Hark! once more,
How floats the God's exultant strain
In answer to Apollo!

"The wind in the reeds and the rushes,
The bees on the bells of thyme,
The birds on the myrtle bushes,
The cicàle above in the lime,
And the lizards below in the grass
Are as silent as ever old Tmolus was,
Listening to my sweet pipings."

III

I cannot separate the minstrels' worth;
Each is alike transcendent and divine.
What were the Day, unless it lighted Earth?
And what were Earth, should Day forget to shine!
But were you here, my Friend, we twain would build
Two altars, on the mountain's sunward side:
There Pan should o'er my sacrifice preside,
And there Apollo your oblation gild.
He is your God, but mine is shaggy Pan;
Yet, as their music no discordance made,
So shall our offerings side by side be laid,
And the same wind the rival incense fan.

IV

You strain your ear to catch the harmonies
That in some finer region have their birth;
I turn, despairing, from the quest of these,
And seek to learn the native tongue of Earth.
In "Fancy's tropic clime" your castle stands,
A shining miracle of rarest art;
I pitch my tent upon the naked sands,
And the tall palm, that plumes the orient lands,
Can with its beauty satisfy my heart.
You, in your starry trances, breathe the air
Of lost Elysium, pluck the snowy bells
Of lotus and Olympian asphodels,
And bid us their diviner odors share.
I at the threshold of that world have lain,
Gazed on its glory, heard the grand acclaim
Wherewith its trumpets hail the sons of Fame,
And striven its speech to master — but in vain.

And now I turn, to find a late content
In Nature, making mine her myriad shows;
Better contented with one living rose
Than all the Gods' ambrosia; sternly bent
On wresting from her hand the cup, whence flow
The flavors of her ruddiest life — the change
Of climes and races — the unshackled range
Of all experience; — that my songs may show
The warm red blood that beats in hearts of men,
And those who read them in the festering den
Of cities, may behold the open sky,
And hear the rhythm of the winds that blow,
Instinct with Freedom. Blame me not, that I
Find in the forms of Earth a deeper joy
Than in the dreams which lured me as a boy,
And leave the Heavens, where you are wandering still
With bright Apollo, to converse with Pan;
For, though full soon our courses separate ran,
We, like the Gods, can meet on Tmolus' hill.

V

There is no jealous rivalry in Song:
I see your altar on the hill-top shine,
And mine is built in shadows of the Pine,
Yet the same worships unto each belong.
Different the Gods, yet one the sacred awe
Their presence brings us, one the reverent heart
Wherewith we honor the immortal law
Of that high inspiration, which is Art.
Take, therefore, Friend! these Voices of the Earth,
The rhythmic records of my life's career,
Humble, perhaps, yet wanting not the worth
Of Truth, and to the heart of Nature near.
Take them, and your acceptance, in the dearth
Of the world's tardy praise, shall make them dear.

A PÆAN TO THE DAWN

I

The dusky sky fades into blue,
And bluer waters bind us;
The stars are glimmering faint and few,
The night is left behind us!
Turn not where sinks the sullen dark
Before the signs of warning,
But crowd the canvas on our bark
And sail to meet the morning.
Rejoice! rejoice! the hues that fill
The orient, flush and lighten;
And over the blue Ionian hill
The Dawn begins to brighten!

II

We leave the Night, that weighed so long
Upon the soul's endeavor,
For Morning, on these hills of Song,
Has made her home forever.
Hark to the sound of trump and lyre,
In the olive-groves before us,
And the rhythmic beat, the pulse of fire
Throbs in the full-voice chorus!
More than Memnonian grandeur speaks
In the triumph of the pæan,
And all the glory of the Greeks
Breathes o'er the old Ægean.

III

Here shall the ancient Dawn return,
That lit the earliest poet,
Whose very ashes in his urn
Would radiate glory through it, —
The dawn of Life, when Life was Song,
And Song the life of Nature,
And the Singer stood amid the throng, —
A God in every feature!
When Love was free, and free as air
The utterance of Passion,
And the heart in every fold lay bare,
Nor shamed its true expression.

IV

Then perfect limb and perfect face
Surpassed our best ideal;
Unconscious Nature's law was grace, —
The Beautiful was real.
For men acknowledged true desires,
And light as garlands wore them;
They were begot by vigorous sires,
And noble mothers bore them.
Oh, when the shapes of Art they planned
Were living forms of passion,
Impulse and Deed went hand in hand,
And Life was more than Fashion!

V

The seeds of Song they scattered first
Flower in all later pages;
Their forms have woke the Artist's thirst
Through the succeeding ages:
But I will seek the fountain-head
Whence flowed their inspiration,
And lead the unshackled life they led,
Accordant with Creation.
The World's false life, that follows still,
Has ceased its chain to tighten,
And over the blue Ionian hill
I see the sunrise brighten!

1854.

THE POET IN THE EAST

The Poet came to the Land of the East,
When spring was in the air:
The Earth was dressed for a wedding feast,
So young she seemed, and fair;
And the Poet knew the Land of the East, —
His soul was native there.

All things to him were the visible forms
Of early and precious dreams, —
Familiar visions that mocked his quest
Beside the Western streams,
Or gleamed in the gold of the clouds, unrolled
In the sunset's dying beams.

He looked above in the cloudless calm,
And the Sun sat on his throne;
The breath of gardens, deep in balm,
Was all about him blown,
And a brother to him was the princely Palm,
For he cannot live alone.

His feet went forth on the myrtled hills,
And the flowers their welcome shed;
The meads of milk-white asphodel
They knew the Poet's tread,
And far and wide, in a scarlet tide,
The poppy's bonfire spread.

And, half in shade and half in sun,
The Rose sat in her bower,
With a passionate thrill in her crimson heart —
She had waited for the hour!
And, like a bride's, the Poet kissed
The lips of the glorious flower.

Then the Nightingale, who sat above
In the boughs of the citron-tree,
Sang: We are no rivals, brother mine,
Except in minstrelsy;
For the rose you kissed with the kiss of love,
She is faithful still to me.

And further sang the Nightingale:
Your bower not distant lies.
I heard the sound of a Persian lute
From the jasmined window rise,
And, twin-bright stars, through the lattice-bars,
I saw the Sultana's eyes.

The Poet said: I will here abide,
In the Sun's unclouded door;

Here are the wells of all delight
On the lost Arcadian shore:
Here is the light on sea and land,
And the dream deceives no more.

Cawnpore, 1853.

THE TEMPTATION OF HASSAN BEN KHALED

I

Hassan Ben Khaled, singing in the streets
Of Cairo, sang these verses at my door:
"Blessed is he, who God and Prophet greets
Each morn with prayer; but he is blest much more
Whose conduct is his prayer's interpreter
Sweeter than musk, and pleasanter than myrrh,
Richer than rubies, shall his portion be,
When God bids Azrael, 'Bring him unto me!'
But woe to him whose life casts dirt upon
The Prophet's word! When all his days are done,
Him shall the Evil Angel trample down
Out of the sight of God." Thus, with a frown
Of the severest virtue, Hassan sang
Unto the people, till the markets rang.

II

But two days after this, he came again
And sang, and I remarked an altered strain.
Before my shop he stood, with forehead bent
Like one whose sin hath made him penitent, —
In whom the pride, that like a stately reed
Lifted his head, is broken. "Blest indeed,"
(These were his words,) "is he who never fell,
But blest much more, who from the verge of Hell
Climbs up to Paradise: for Sin is sweet;
Strong is Temptation; willing are the feet
That follow Pleasure, manifold her snares,
And pitfalls lurk beneath our very prayers:
Yet God, the Clement, the Compassionate,
In pity of our weakness keeps the gate
Of Pardon open, scorning not to wait
Till the last moment, when His mercy flings
Splendor from the shade of Azrael's wings."
"Wherefore, O Poet!" I to Hassan said,
"This altered measure? Wherefore hang your head,
O Hassan! whom the pride of virtue gives
The right to face the holiest man that lives?
Enter, I pray thee: this poor house will be
Honored henceforth, if it may shelter thee."
Hassan Ben Khaled lifted up his eyes
To mine, a moment: then, in cheerful guise,
He passed my threshold with unslippered feet.

III

I led him from the noises of the street
To the cool inner chambers, where my slave
Poured out the pitcher's rosy-scented wave
Over his hands, and laid upon his knee
The napkin, silver-fringed: and when the pipe
Exhaled a grateful odor from the ripe
Latakian leaves, said Hassan unto me:
"Listen, O Man! no man can truly say
That he hath wisdom. What I sang to-day
Was not less truth than what I sang before,
But to Truth's house there is a single door,

Which is Experience. He teaches best,
Who feels the hearts of all men in his breast,
And knows their strength or weakness through his own.
The holy pride, that never was o'erthrown,
Was never tempted, and its words of blame
Reach but the dull ears of the multitude:
The admonitions, fruitful unto good,
Come from the voice of him who conquers shame."

IV

"Give me, O Poet! (if thy friend may be
Worthy such confidence,)" I said, "the key
Unto thy words, that I may share with thee
Thine added wisdom." Hassan's kindly eye
Before his lips unclosed, spake willingly,
And he began: "But two days since, I went
Singing what thou didst hear, with soul intent
On my own virtue, all the markets through;
And when about the time of prayer, I drew
Near the Gate of Victory, behold!
There came a man, whose turban fringed with gold
And golden cimeter, bespake his wealth:
'May God prolong thy days, O Hassan! Health
And Fortune be thy wisdom's aids!' he cried;
'Come to my garden by the river's side,
Where other poets wait thee. Be my guest,
For even the Prophets had their times of rest,
And Rest, that strengthens unto virtuous deeds,
Is one with Prayer.' Two royal-blooded steeds,
Held by his grooms, were waiting at the gate,
And though I shrank from such unwonted state
The master's words were manna to my pride,
And, mounting straightway, forth we twain did ride
Unto the garden by the river's side.

V

"Never till then had I beheld such bloom.
The west-wind sent its heralds of perfume
To bid us welcome, midway on the road.
Full in the sun the marble portal glowed
Like silver, but within the garden wall
No ray of sunshine found a place to fall,
So thick the crowning foliage of the trees,
Roofing the walks with twilight; and the air
Under their tops was greener than the seas,
And cool as they. The forms that wandered there
Resembled those who populate the floor
Of Ocean, and the royal lineage own
That gave a Princess unto Persia's throne.
All fruits the trees of this fair garden bore,
Whose balmy fragrance lured the tongue to taste
Their flavors: there bananas flung to waste
Their golden flagons with thick honey filled;
From splintered cups the ripe pomegranates spilled
A shower of rubies; oranges that glow
Like globes of fire, enclosed a heart of snow
Which thawed not in their flame; like balls of gold
The peaches seemed, that had in blood been rolled;
Pure saffron mixed with clearest amber stained
The apricots; bunches of amethyst
And sapphire seemed the grapes, so newly kissed
That still the mist of Beauty's breath remained;

And where the lotus slowly swung in air
Her snowy-bosomed chalice, rosy-veined,
The golden fruit swung softly-cradled there,
Even as a bell upon the bosom swings
Of some fair dancer, — happy bell, that sings
For joy, its golden tinkle keeping time
To the heart's beating and the cymbal's chime!
There dates of agate and of jasper lay,
Dropped from the bounty of the pregnant palm,
And all ambrosial trees, all fruits of balm,
All flowers of precious odors, made the day
Sweet as a morn of Paradise. My breath
Failed with the rapture, and with doubtful mind
I turned to where the garden's lord reclined,
And asked, 'Was not that gate the Gate of Death?'

VI

"'The guests were near a fountain. As I came
They rose in welcome, wedding to my name
Titles of honor, linked in choicest phrase,
For Poets' ears are ever quick to Praise,
The 'Open Sesamè!' whose magic art
Forces the guarded entrance of the heart.
Young men were they, whose manly beauty made
Their words the sweeter, and their speech displayed
Knowledge of men, and of the Prophet's laws.
Pleasant our converse was, where every pause
Gave to the fountain leave to sing its song,
Suggesting further speech; until, erelong,
There came a troop of swarthy slaves, who bore
Ewers and pitchers all of silver ore,
Wherein we washed our hands; then, tables placed,
And brought us meats of every sumptuous taste
That makes the blood rich, — pheasants stuffed with spice;
Young lambs, whose entrails were of cloves and rice;
Ducks bursting with pistachio nuts, and fish
That in a bed of parsley swam. Each dish,
Cooked with such art, seemed better than the last,
And our indulgence in the rich repast
Brought on the darkness ere we missed the day:
But lamps were lighted in the fountain's spray,
Or, pendent from the boughs, their colors told
What fruits unseen, of crimson or of gold,
Scented the gloom. Then took the generous host
A basket filled with roses. Every guest
Cried, 'Give me roses!' and he thus addressed
His words to all: 'He who exalts them most
In song, he only shall the roses wear.'
Then sang a guest: 'The rose's cheeks are fair;
It crowns the purple bowl, and no one knows
If the rose colors it, or it the rose.'
And sang another: 'Crimson is its hue,
And on its breast the morning's crystal dew
Is changed to rubies.' Then a third replied:
'It blushes in the sun's enamored sight,
As a young virgin on her wedding night,
When from her face the bridegroom lifts the veil.'
When all had sung their songs, I, Hassan, tried.
'The Rose,' I sang, 'is either red or pale,
Like maidens whom the flame of passion burns,
And Love or Jealousy controls, by turns.

Its buds are lips preparing for a kiss;
Its open flowers are like the blush of bliss
On lovers' cheeks; the thorns its armor are,
And in its centre shines a golden star,
As on a favorite's cheek a sequin glows —
And thus the garden's favorite is the Rose.'

VII

"'The master from his open basket shook
The roses on my head. The others took
Their silver cups, and filling them with wine,
Cried, 'Pledge our singing, Hassan, as we thine!'
But I exclaimed, 'What is it I have heard?
Wine is forbidden by the Prophet's word:
Surely, O Friends! ye would not lightly break
The laws which bring ye blessing?' Then they spake:
'O Poet, learn thou that the law was made
For men, and not for poets. Turn thine eye
Within, and read the nature there displayed;
The gifts thou hast doth Allah's grace deny
To common men; they lift thee o'er the rules
The Prophet fixed for sinners and for fools.
The vine is Nature's poet: from his bloom
The air goes reeling, tipsy with perfume,
And when the sun is warm within his blood
It mounts and sparkles in a crimson flood;
Rich with dumb songs he speaks not, till they find
Interpretation in the Poet's mind.
If Wine be evil, Song is evil too;
Then cease thy singing, lest it bring thee sin;
But wouldst thou know the strains which Hafiz knew,
Drink as he drank, and thus the secret win.'
They clasped my glowing hands; they held the bowl
Up to my lips, till, losing all control
Of the fierce thirst, which at my scruples laughed,
I drained the goblet at a single draught.
It ran through every limb like fluid fire:
'More, O my Friends!' I cried, the new desire
Raging within me: 'this is life indeed!
From blood like this is coined the nobler seed
Whence poets are begotten. Drink again,
And give us music of a tender strain,
Linking your inspiration unto mine,
For music hovers on the lips of Wine!'

VIII

"'Music!' they shouted, echoing my demand,
And answered with a beckon of his hand
The gracious host, whereat a maiden, fair
As the last star that leaves the morning air,
Came down the leafy paths. Her veil revealed
The beauty of her face, which, half concealed
Behind its thin blue folds, showed like the moon
Behind a cloud that will forsake it soon.
Her hair was braided darkness, but the glance
Of lightning eyes shot from her countenance,
And showed her neck, that like an ivory tower
Rose o'er the twin domes of her marble breast.
Were all the beauty of this age compressed
Into one form, she would transcend its power.
Her step was lighter than the young gazelle's,

And as she walked, her anklet's golden bells
Tinkled with pleasure, but were quickly mute
With jealousy, as from a case she drew
With snowy hands the pieces of her lute,
And took her seat before me. As it grew
To perfect shape, her lovely arms she bent
Around the neck of the sweet instrument,
Till from her soft caresses it awoke
To consciousness, and thus its rapture spoke:
'I was a tree within an Indian vale,
When first I heard the love-sick nightingale
Declare his passion: every leaf was stirred
With the melodious sorrow of the bird,
And when he ceased, the song remained with me.
Men came anon, and felled the harmless tree,
But from the memory of the songs I heard,
The spoiler saved me from the destiny
Whereby my brethren perished. O'er the sea
I came, and from its loud, tumultuous moan
I caught a soft and solemn undertone;
And when I grew beneath the maker's hand
To what thou seest, he sang (the while he planned)
The mirthful measures of a careless heart,
And of my soul his songs became a part.
Now they have laid my head upon a breast
Whiter than marble, I am wholly blest.
The fair hands smite me, and my strings complain
With such melodious cries, they smite again,
Until, with passion and with sorrow swayed,
My torment moves the bosom of the maid,
Who hears it speak her own. I am the voice
Whereby the lovers languish or rejoice;
And they caress me, knowing that my strain
Alone can speak the language of their pain.'

IX

"Here ceased the fingers of the maid to stray
Over the strings; the sweet song died away
In mellow, drowsy murmurs, and the lute
Leaned on her fairest bosom, and was mute.
Better than wine that music was to me:
Not the lute only felt her hands, but she
Played on my heart-strings, till the sounds became
Incarnate in the pulses of my frame.
Speech left my tongue, and in my tears alone
Found utterance. With stretched arms I implored
Continuance, whereat her fingers poured
A tenderer music, answering the tone
Her parted lips released, the while her throat
Throbbed, as a heavenly bird were fluttering there,
And gave her voice the wonder of his note.
'His brow,' she sang, 'is white beneath his hair;
The fertile beard is soft upon his chin,
Shading the mouth that nestles warm within,
As a rose nestles in its leaves; I see
His eyes, but cannot tell what hue they be,
For the sharp eyelash, like a sabre, speaks
The martial law of Passion; in his cheeks
The quick blood mounts, and then as quickly goes,
Leaving a tint like marble when a rose
Is held inside it: — bid him veil his eyes,
Lest all my soul should unto mine arise,

And he behold it!' As she sang, her glance
Dwelt on my face; her beauty, like a lance,
Transfixed my heart. I melted into sighs,
Slain by the arrows of her beauteous eyes.
'Why is her bosom made' (I cried) 'a snare?
Why does a single ringlet of her hair
Hold my heart captive?' 'Would you know?' she said;
'It is that you are mad with love, and chains
Were made for madmen.' Then she raised her head
With answering love, that led to other strains,
Until the lute, which shared with her the smart,
Rocked as in storm upon her beating heart.
Thus to its wires she made impassioned cries:
'I swear it by the brightness of his eyes,
I swear it by the darkness of his hair;
By the warm bloom his limbs and bosom wear;
By the fresh pearls his rosy lips enclose;
By the calm majesty of his repose;
By smiles I coveted, and frowns I feared,
And by the shooting myrtles of his beard, —
I swear it, that from him the morning drew
Its freshness, and the moon her silvery hue,
The sun his brightness, and the stars their fire,
And musk and camphor all their odorous breath:
And if he answer not my love's desire,
Day will be night to me, and Life be Death!'

X

"Scarce had she ceased, when, overcome, I fell
Upon her bosom, where the lute no more
That night was cradled; song was silenced well
With kisses, each one sweeter than before,
Until their fiery dew so long was quaffed,
I drank delirium in the infectious draught.
The guests departed, but the sounds they made
I heard not; in the fountain-haunted shade
The lamps burned out; the moon rode far above,
But the trees chased her from our nest of love.
Dizzy with passion, in mine ears the blood
Tingled and hummed in a tumultuous flood,
Until from deep to deep I seemed to fall,
Like him, who from El Sirat's hair-drawn wall
Plunges to endless gulfs. In broken gleams
Glimmered the things I saw, so mixed with dreams
The vain confusion blinded every sense,
And knowledge left me. Then a sleep intense
Fell on my brain, and held me as the dead,
Until a sudden tumult smote my head,
And a strong glare, as when a torch is hurled
Before a sleeper's eyes, brought back the world.

XI

"Most wonderful! The fountain and the trees
Had disappeared, and in the place of these
I saw the well-known Gate of Victory.
The sun was high; the people looked at me,
And marvelled that a sleeper should be there
On the hot pavement, for the second prayer
Was called from all the minarets. I passed
My hand across my eyes, and found at last

What man I was. Then straightway through my heart
There rang a double pang, — the bitter smart
Of evil knowledge, and the unhealthy lust
Of sinful pleasure; and I threw the dust
Upon my head, the burial of my pride, —
The ashen soil, wherein I plant the tree
Of Penitence. The people saw, and cried,
'May God reward thee, Hassan! Truly, thou,
Whom men have honored, addest to thy brow
The crowning lustre of Humility:
As thou abasest, God exalteth thee!'
Which when I heard, I shed such tears of shame
As might erase the record of my blame,
And from that time I have not dared to curse
The unrighteous, since the man who seemeth worse
Than I, may purer be; for, when I fell
Temptation reached a loftier pinnacle.
Therefore, O Man! be Charity thy aim:
Praise cannot harm, but weigh thy words of blame.
Distrust the Virtue that itself exalts,
But turn to that which doth avow its faults,
And from Repentance plucks a wholesome fruit.
Pardon, not Wrath, is God's best attribute."

XII

"The tale, O Poet! which thy lips have told,"
I said, "is words of rubies set in gold.
Precious the wisdom which from evil draws
Strength to fulfil the good, of Allah's laws.
But lift thy head, O Hassan! Thine own words
Shall best console thee, for my tongue affords
No phrase but thanks for what thou hast bestowed;
And yet I fain would have thee shake the load
Of shame from off thy shoulders, seeing still
That by this fall thou hast increased thy will
To do the work which makes thee truly blest."
Hassan Ben Khaled wept and smote his breast:
"Hold! hold, O Man!" he cried: "why make me feel
A deeper shame? Why force me to reveal
That Sin is as the leprous taint no art
Can cleanse the blood from? In my secret heart
I do believe I hold at dearer cost
The vanished Pleasure, than the Virtue lost."

So saying, he arose and went his way;
And Allah grant he go no more astray.

1854.

EL KHALIL

I AM no chieftain, fit to lead
Where spears are hurled and warriors bleed;
No poet, in my chanted rhyme
To rouse the ghosts of ancient time;
No magian, with a subtle ken
To rule the thoughts of other men;
Yet far as sounds the Arab tongue
My name is known to old and young.

My form has lost its pliant grace,
There is no beauty in my face,
There is no cunning in my arm,
The Children of the Sun to charm;
Yet, where I go, my people's eyes
Are lighted with a glad surprise,
And in each tent a couch is free,
And by each fire a place, for me.

They watch me from the palms, and some
Proclaim my coming ere I come.
The children lift my hand to meet
The homage of their kisses sweet;
With manly warmth the men embrace,
The veilèd maidens seek my face,

And eyes, fresh kindled from the heart
Keep loving watch when I depart.

On God, the Merciful, I call,
To shed His blessing over all:
I praise His name, for He is Great,
And Loving, and Compassionate;
And for the gift of love I give —
The breath of life whereby I live —
He gives me back, in overflow,
His children's love, where'er I go.

Deep sunk in sin the man must be
That has no friendly word for me.
I pass through tribes whose trade is death,
And not a sabre quits the sheath;
For strong, and cruel as they prove,
The sons of men are weak to Love.
The humblest gifts to them I bring;
Yet in their hearts I rule, a king.

1853.

SONG

Daughter of Egypt, veil thine eyes!
I cannot bear their fire;
Nor will I touch with sacrifice
Those altars of Desire.
For they are flames that shun the day,
And their unholy light
Is fed from natures gone astray
In passion and in night.

The stars of Beauty and of Sin,
They burn amid the dark,
Like beacons that to ruin win
The fascinated bark.
Then veil their glow, lest I forswear
The hopes thou canst not crown,
And in the black waves of thy hair
My struggling manhood drown!

1853.

AMRAN'S WOOING

I

You ask, O Frank! how Love is born
Within these glowing climes of Morn,
Where envious veils conceal the charms
That tempt a Western lover's arms,
And how, without a voice or sound,
From heart to heart the path is found,
Since on the eye alone is flung
The burden of the silent tongue.
You hearken with a doubtful smile
Whene'er the wandering bards beguile
Our evening indolence with strains
Whose words gush molten through our veins, —
The songs of Love, but half confessed,
Where Passion sobs on Sorrow's breast,
And mighty longings, tender fears,
Steep the strong heart in fire and tears.
The source of each accordant strain
Lies deeper than the Poet's brain.
First from the people's heart must spring
The passions which he learns to sing;
They are the wind, the harp is he,
To voice their fitful melody, —
The language of their varying fate,
Their pride, grief, love, ambition, hate, —
The talisman which holds inwrought
The touchstone of the listener's thought;
That penetrates each vain disguise,
And brings his secret to his eyes.
For, like a solitary bird
That hides among the boughs unheard
Until some mate, whose carol breaks,
Its own betraying song awakes,
So, to its echo in those lays,
The ardent heart itself betrays.
Crowned with a prophet's honor, stands
The Poet, on Arabian sands;
A chief, whose subjects love his thrall, —
The sympathizing heart of all.

II

Vaunt not your Western maids to me,
Whose charms to every gaze are free:
My love is selfish, and would share
Scarce with the sun, or general air,
The sight of beauty which has shone
Once for mine eyes, and mine alone.
Love likes concealment; he can dress
With fancied grace the loveliness
That shrinks behind its virgin veil,
As hides the moon her forehead pale
Behind a cloud, yet leaves the air
Softer than if her orb were there.
And as the splendor of a star,
When sole in heaven, seems brighter far

So shines the eye, Love's star and sun,
The brighter, that it shines alone.
The light from out its darkness sent
Is Passion's life and element;
And when the heart is warm and young,
Let but that single ray be flung
Upon its surface, and the deep
Heaves from its unsuspecting sleep,
As heaves the ocean when its floor
Breaks over the volcano's core.
Who thinks if cheek or lip be fair?
Is not all beauty centred where
The soul looks out, the feelings move,
And Love his answer gives to love?
Look on the sun, and you will find
For other sights your eyes are blind.
Look — if the colder blood you share
Can give your heart the strength to dare —
In eyes of dark and tender fire:
What more can blinded love desire?

III

I was a stripling, quick and bold,
And rich in pride as poor in gold,
When God's good will my journey bent
One day to Shekh Abdallah's tent.
My only treasure was a steed
Of Araby's most precious breed;
And whether 't was in boastful whim
To show his mettled speed of limb,
Or that presumption, which, in sooth,
Becomes the careless brow of youth, —
Which takes the world as birds the air,
And moves in freedom everywhere, —
It matters not. But 'midst the tents
I rode in easy confidence,
Till to Abdallah's door I pressed
And made myself the old man's guest.
My "Peace be with you!" was returned
With the grave courtesy he learned
From age and long authority,
And in God's name he welcomed me.
The pipe replenished, with its stem
Of jasmine wood and amber gem,
Was at my lips, and while I drew
The rosy-sweet, soft vapor through
In ringlets of dissolving blue,
Waiting his speech with reverence meet,
A woman's garments brushed my feet,
And first through boyish senses ran
The pulse of love which made me man.
The handmaid of her father's cheer,
With timid grace she glided near,
And, lightly dropping on her knee,
Held out a silver zerf to me,
Within whose cup the fragrance sent
From Yemen's sunburnt berries blent
With odors of the Persian rose.
That picture still in memory glows
With the same heat as then, — the gush
Of fever, with its fiery flush
Startling my blood; and I can see —
As she this moment knelt to me —
The shrouded graces of her form;
The half-seen arm, so round and warm;
The little hand, whose tender veins
Branched through the henna's orange stains;
The head, in act of offering bent;
And through the parted veil, which lent
A charm for what it hid, the eye,
Gazelle-like, large, and dark, and shy,
That with a soft, sweet tremble shone
Beneath the fervor of my own,
Yet could not, would not, turn away
The fascination of its ray,
But half in pleasure, half in fright,
Grew unto mine, and builded bright
From heart to heart a bridge of light.

IV

From the fond trouble of my look
The zerf within her fingers shook,
As with a start, like one who breaks
Some happy trance of thought, and wakes
Unto forgotten toil, she rose
And passed. I saw the curtains close
Behind her steps: the light was gone,
But in the dark my heart dreamed on.
Some random words — thanks ill expressed —
I to the stately Shekh addressed,
With the intelligence which he,
My host, could not demand of me;
How, wandering in the desert chase,
I spied from far his camping-place,
And Arab honor bade me halt
To break his bread and share his salt.
Thereto, fit reverence for his name,
The praise our speech is quick to frame,

Which, empty though it seem, was dear
To the old warrior's willing ear,
And led his thoughts, by many a track,
To deeds of ancient prowess back,
Until my love could safely hide
Beneath the covert of his pride.
And when his "Go with God!" was said,
Upon El-Azrek's back I sped
Into the desert, wide and far,
Beneath the silver evening-star,
And, fierce with passion, without heed
Urged o'er the sands my snorting steed
As if those afrites, feared of man, —
Who watch the lonely caravan,
And, if a loiterer lags behind,
Efface its tracks with sudden wind,
Then fill the air with cheating cries,
And make false pictures to his eyes
Till the bewildered sufferer dies, —
Had breathed on me their demon breath
And spurred me to the hunt of Death.

V

Yet madness such as this was worth
All the cool wisdom of the earth,
And sweeter glowed its wild unrest
Than the old calm of brain and breast.
The image of that maiden beamed
Through all I saw, or thought, or dreamed,
Till she became, like Light or Air,
A part of life. And she shall share,
I vowed, my passion and my fate,
Or both shall fail me, soon or late,
In the vain effort to possess;
For Life lives only in success.
I could not, in her father's sight,
Purchase the hand which was his right,
And well I knew how quick denied
The prayer would be to empty pride;
But Heaven and Earth shall sooner move
Than bar the energy of Love.
The sinews of my life became
Obedient to that single aim,
And desperate deed and patient thought
Together in its service wrought.
Keen as a falcon, when his eye
In search of quarry reads the sky,
I stole unseen, at eventide,
Behind the well, upon whose side
The girls their jars of water leaned.
By one long, sandy hillock screened,
I watched the forms that went and came,
With eyes that sparkled with the flame
Up from my heart in flashes sent,
As one by one they came and went
Amid the sunset radiance cast
On the red sands: they came and passed,
And she, — thank God! — she came at last!

VI

Then, while her fair companion bound
The cord her pitcher's throat around,
And steadied with a careful hand
Its slow descent, upon the sand
At the Shekh's daughter's feet, I sped
A slender arrow, shaft and head
With breathing jasmine-flowers entwined,
And roses such as on the wind
Of evening with rich odors fan
The white kiosks of Ispahan.
A moment, fired with love and hope,
I stayed upon the yellow slope
El-Azrek's hoofs, to see her raise
Her startled eyes in sweet amaze, —
To see her make the unconscious sign
Which recognized the gift as mine,
And place, before she turned to part,
The flowery barb against her heart.

VII

Again the Shekh's divan I pressed:
The jasmine pipe was brought the guest,
And Mariam, lovelier than before,
Knelt with the steamy cup once more.
O bliss! within those eyes to see
A soul of love look out on me, —
A fount of passion, which is *truth*
In the wild dialect of Youth, —
Whose rich abundance is outpoured
Like worship at a shrine adored,
And on its rising deluge bears
The heart to raptures or despairs.
While from the cup the zerf contained
The foamy amber juice I drained,
A rose-bud in the zerf expressed
The sweet confession of her breast.
One glance of glad intelligence
And silently she glided thence.

"O Shekh!" I cried, as she withdrew,
(Short is the speech where hearts are true,)
"Thou hast a daughter; let me be
A shield to her, a sword to thee!"
Abdallah turned his steady eye
Full on my face, and made reply:
"It cannot be. The treasure sent
By God must not be idly spent.
Strong men there are, in service tried,
Who seek the maiden for a bride;
And shall I slight their worth and truth
To feed the passing flame of youth?"

VIII

"No passing flame!" my answer ran;
"But love which is the life of man,
Warmed with his blood, fed by his breath,
And, when it fails him, leaves but Death.
O Shekh, I hoped not thy consent;
But having tasted in thy tent
An Arab welcome, shared thy bread,
I come to warn thee I shall wed
Thy daughter, though her suitors be
As leaves upon the tamarind-tree.
Guard her as thou mayst guard, I swear
No other bed than mine shall wear
Her virgin honors, and thy race
Through me shall keep its ancient place.
Thou'rt warned, and duty bids no more;
For, when I next approach thy door,
Her child shall intercessor be
To build up peace 'twixt thee and me."
A little flushed my boyish brow;
But calmly then I spake, as now.
The Shekh, with dignity that flung
Rebuke on my impetuous tongue,
Replied: "The young man's hopes are fair;
The young man's blood would all things dare.
But age is wisdom, and can bring
Confusion on the soaring wing
Of reckless youth. Thy words are just,
But needless; for I still can trust
A father's jealousy to shield
From robber grasp the gem concealed
Within his tent, till he may yield
To fitting hands the precious store.
Go, then, in peace; but come no more."

IX

My only sequin served to bribe
A cunning mother of the tribe
To Mariam's mind my plan to bring.
A feather of the wild dove's wing,
A lock of raven gloss and stain
Sheared from El-Azrek's flowing mane
And that pale flower whose fragrant cup
Is closed until the moon comes up, —
But then a tenderer beauty holds
Than any flower the sun unfolds, —
Declared my purpose. Her reply
Let loose the winds of ecstasy:
Two roses and the moonlight flower
Told the acceptance, and the hour, —
Two daily suns to waste their glow,
And then, at moonrise, bliss — or woe.

X

El-Azrek now, on whom alone
The burden of our fate was thrown,
Claimed from my hands a double meed
Of careful training for the deed.
I gave him of my choicest store —
No guest was ever honored more.
With flesh of kid, with whitest bread
And dates of Egypt was he fed;
The camel's heavy udders gave
Their frothy juice his thirst to lave:
A charger, groomed with better care,
The Sultan never rode to prayer.
My burning hope, my torturing fear,
I breathed in his sagacious ear;
Caressed him as a brother might,
Implored his utmost speed in flight,
Hung on his neck with many a vow,
And kissed the white star on his brow.
His large and lustrous eyeball sent
A look which made me confident,
As if in me some doubt he spied,
And met it with a human pride.
"Enough: I trust thee. 'T is the hour,
And I have need of all thy power.
Without a wing, God gives thee wings,
And Fortune to thy forelock clings."

XI

The yellow moon was rising large
Above the Desert's dusky marge,
And save the jackal's whining moan,
Or distant camel's gurgling groan,
And the lamenting monotone

Of winds that breathe their vain desire
And on the lonely sands expire,
A silent charm, a breathless spell,
Waited with me beside the well.
She is not there, — not yet, — but soon
A white robe glimmers in the moon.
Her little footsteps make no sound
On the soft sand; and with a bound,
Where terror, doubt, and love unite
To blind her heart to all but flight,
Trembling, and panting, and oppressed,
She threw herself upon my breast.
By Allah! like a bath of flame
The seething blood tumultuous came
From life's hot centre as I drew
Her mouth to mine: our spirits grew
Together in one long, long kiss, —
One swooning, speechless pulse of bliss,
That, throbbing from the heart's core met
In the united lips. Oh, yet
The eternal sweetness of that draught
Renews the thirst with which I quaffed
Love's virgin vintage: starry fire
Leapt from the twilights of desire,
And in the golden dawn of dreams
The space grew warm with radiant beams,
Which from that kiss streamed o'er a sea
Of rapture, in whose bosom we
Sank down, and sank eternally.

XII

Now nerve thy limbs, El-Azrek! Fling
Thy head aloft, and like a wing
Spread on the wind thy cloudy mane!
The hunt is up: their stallions strain
The urgent shoulders close behind,
And the wide nostril drinks the wind.
But thou art, too, of Nedjid's breed,
My brother! and the falcon's speed
Slant down the storm's advancing line
Would laggard be if matched with thine.
Still leaping forward, whistling through
The moonlight-laden air, we flew;
And from the distance, threateningly,
Came the pursuer's eager cry.
Still forward, forward, stretched our flight
Through the long hours of middle night;
One after one the followers lagged,
And even my faithful Azrek flagged
Beneath his double burden, till
The streaks of dawn began to fill
The East, and freshening in the race,
Their goaded horses gained apace.
I drew my dagger, cut the girth,
Tumbled my saddle to the earth,
And clasped with desperate energies
My stallion's side with iron knees;
While Mariam, clinging to my breast,
The closer for that peril pressed.
They come! they come! Their shouts we hear,
Now faint and far, now fierce and near.
O brave El-Azrek! on the track
Let not one fainting sinew slack,
Or know thine agony of flight
Endured in vain! The purple light
Of breaking morn has come at last.
O joy! the thirty leagues are past;
And, gleaming in the sunrise, see,
The white tents of the Aneyzee!
The warriors of the waste, the foes
Of Shekh Abdallah's tribe, are those
Whose shelter and support I claim,
Which they bestow in Allah's name;
While, wheeling back, the baffled few
No longer venture to pursue.

XIII

And now, O Frank! if you would see
How soft the eyes that looked on me
Through Mariam's silky lashes, scan
Those of my little Solyman.
And should you marvel if the child
His stately grandsire reconciled
To that bold theft, when years had brought
The golden portion which he sought,
And what upon this theme befell,
The Shekh himself can better tell.

Off the Cape of Good Hope, 1853.

A PLEDGE TO HAFIZ

Brim the bowls with Shiraz wine!
Roses round your temples twine;
Brim the bowls with Shiraz wine, —
Hafiz pledge we, Bard divine!
With the summer warmth that glows
In the wine and on the rose,

Blushing, fervid, ruby-bright,
We shall pledge his name aright.

Hafiz, in whose measures move
Youth and Beauty, Song and Love, —
In his veins the nimble flood
Was of wine, and not of blood.
All the songs he sang or thought
In his brain were never wrought,
But like rose-leaves fell apart
From that bursting rose, his heart.

Youth is morning's transient ray;
Love consumes itself away;
Time destroys what Beauty gives;
But in Song the Poet lives.
While we pledge him — thus — and thus —
He is present here in us;
'T is his voice that cries, not mine:
Brim the bowls with Shiraz wine!

1852.

THE GARDEN OF IREM

I

Have you seen the Garden of Irem?
No mortal knoweth the road thereto.
Find me a path in the mists that gather
When the sunbeams scatter the morning dew,
And I will lead you thither.
Give me a key to the halls of the sun
When he goes behind the purple sea,
Or a wand to open the vaults that run
Down to the afrite-guarded treasures,
And I will open its doors to thee.
Who hath tasted its countless pleasures?
Who hath breathed, in its winds of spice,
Raptures deeper than Paradise?
Who hath trodden its ivory floors,
Where the fount drops pearls from a golden shell,
And heard the hinges of diamond doors
Swing to the music of Israfel?
Its roses blossom, its palms arise,
By the phantom stream that flows so fair
Under the Desert's burning skies.
Can you reach that flood, can you drink its tide,
Can you swim its waves to the farther side,
Your feet may enter there.

II

I have seen the Garden of Irem.
I found it, but I sought it not:
Without a path, without a guide,
I found the enchanted spot:
Without a key its golden gate stood wide.
I was young, and strong, and bold, and free
As the milk-white foal of the Nedjidee,
And the blood in my veins was like sap of the vine,
That stirs, and mounts, and will not stop
Till the breathing blossoms that bring the wine
Have drained its balm to the last sweet drop.
Lance and barb were all I knew,
Till deep in the Desert the spot I found,
Where the marvellous gates of Irem threw
Their splendors over an unknown ground.
Mine were the pearl and ivory floors,
Mine the music of diamond doors,
Turning each on a newer glory:
Mine were the roses whose bloom outran
The spring-time beauty of Gulistan,
And the fabulous flowers of Persian story.
Mine were the palms of silver stems,
And blazing emerald for diadems;
The fretted arch and the gossamer wreath,
So light and frail you feared to breathe;
Yet o'er them rested the pendent spars
Of domes bespangled with silver stars,
And crusted gems of rare adorning:
And ever higher, like a shaft of fire,
The lessening links of the golden spire
Flamed in the myriad-colored morning!

Like one who lies on the marble lip
Of the blessed bath in a tranquil rest,
And stirs not even a finger's tip
Lest the beatific dream should slip,
So did I lie in Irem's breast.
Sweeter than Life and stronger than Death
Was every draught of that blissful breath;
Warmer than summer came its glow
To the youthful heart in a mighty flood,

And sent its bold and generous blood
To water the world in its onward flow.
There, where the Garden of Irem lies,
Are the roots of the Tree of Paradise,
And happy are they who sit below,
When into this world of Strife and Death
The blossoms are shaken by Allah's breath.

Granada, 1852.

THE WISDOM OF ALI

AN ARAB LEGEND

THE Prophet once, sitting in calm debate,
Said: "I am Wisdom's fortress; but the gate
Thereof is Ali." Wherefore, some who heard,
With unbelieving jealousy were stirred;
And, that they might on him confusion bring,
Ten of the boldest joined to prove the thing.
"Let us in turn to Ali go," they said,
"And ask if Wisdom should be sought instead
Of earthly riches; then, if he reply
To each of us, in thought, accordantly,
And yet to none, in speech or phrase, the same,
His shall the honor be, and ours the shame."

Now, when the first his bold demand did make,
These were the words which Ali straightway spake: —

"Wisdom is the inheritance of those
Whom Allah favors; riches, of his foes."

Unto the second he said: "Thyself must be
Guard to thy wealth; but Wisdom guardeth thee."

Unto the third: "By Wisdom wealth is won;
But riches purchased wisdom yet for none."

Unto the fourth: "Thy goods the thief may take;
But into Wisdom's house he cannot break."

Unto the fifth: "Thy goods decrease the more
Thou giv'st; but use enlarges Wisdom's store."

Unto the sixth: "Wealth tempts to evil ways;
But the desire of Wisdom is God's praise."

Unto the seventh: "Divide thy wealth, each part
Becomes a pittance. Give with open heart

"Thy wisdom, and each separate gift shall be
All that thou hast, yet not impoverish thee."

Unto the eighth: "Wealth cannot keep itself;
But Wisdom is the steward even of pelf."

Unto the ninth: "The camels slowly bring
Thy goods; but Wisdom has the swallow's wing."

And lastly, when the tenth did question make,
These were the ready words which Ali spake: —
"Wealth is a darkness which the soul should fear;
But Wisdom is the lamp that makes it clear."

Crimson with shame the questioners withdrew,
And they declared: "The Prophet's words were true;
The mouth of Ali is the golden door
Of Wisdom."

When his friends to Ali bore
These words, he smiled and said:
"And should they ask
The same until my dying day, the task

[*Facsimile from the original manuscript*]

Bedouin Song.

From the Desert I come to thee,
On a stallion shod with fire,
And the winds are left behind
In the speed of my desire.
Under thy window I stand,
And the midnight hears my cry.
I love thee, I love but thee,
With a love that never shall die,
Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold!

Look from thy window, and see
My passion and my pain;
I lie on the sands below,
And I faint in thy disdain:
Let the night-winds touch thy brow
With the heat of my burning sigh,
And melt thee to hear the vow
Of a love that never shall die,
Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold!

My steps are nightly driven
By the fever in my breast,
To hear from thy lattice breathed
The word that shall give me rest.
Open the door of thy heart,
And open thy chamber door,
And my kisses shall teach thy lips
The love that shall fade nevermore,
Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment
Book unfold!

Oct. 29, 1853.

Were easy; for the stream from Wisdom's well,
Which God supplies, is inexhaustible."

1854.

AN ORIENTAL IDYL

A SILVER javelin which the hills
Have hurled upon the plain below,
The fleetest of the Pharpar's rills,
Beneath me shoots in flashing flow.

I hear the never-ending laugh
Of jostling waves that come and go,
And suck the bubbling pipe, and quaff
The sherbet cooled in mountain snow.

The flecks of sunshine gleam like stars
Beneath the canopy of shade;
And in the distant, dim bazaars
I scarcely hear the hum of trade.

No evil fear, no dream forlorn,
Darkens my heaven of perfect blue;
My blood is tempered to the morn, —
My very heart is steeped in dew.

What Evil is I cannot tell;
But half I guess what Joy may be;
And, as a pearl within its shell,
The happy spirit sleeps in me.

I feel no more the pulse's strife, —
The tides of Passion's ruddy sea, —
But live the sweet, unconscious life
That breathes from yonder jasmine tree.

Upon the glittering pageantries
Of gay Damascus' streets I look
As idly as a babe that sees
The painted pictures of a book.

Forgotten now are name and race;
The Past is blotted from my brain;
For Memory sleeps, and will not trace
The weary pages o'er again.

I only know the morning shines,
And sweet the dewy morning air;
But does it play with tendrilled vines?
Or does it lightly lift my hair?

Deep-sunken in the charmed repose,
This ignorance is bliss extreme:
And whether I be Man, or Rose,
Oh, pluck me not from out my dream!

1854.

BEDOUIN SONG

FROM the Desert I come to thee
On a stallion shod with fire;
And the winds are left behind
In the speed of my desire.
Under thy window I stand,
And the midnight hears my cry:
I love thee, I love but thee,
With a love that shall not die
Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment
Book unfold!

Look from thy window and see
My passion and my pain;
I lie on the sands below,
And I faint in thy disdain.
Let the night-winds touch thy brow
With the heat of my burning sigh,
And melt thee to hear the vow
Of a love that shall not die
Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment
Book unfold!

My steps are nightly driven,
By the fever in my breast,
To hear from thy lattice breathed
The word that shall give me rest.
Open the door of thy heart,
And open thy chamber door,
And my kisses shall teach thy lips
The love that shall fade no more
Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old,
And the leaves of the Judgment
Book unfold!

Mozambique Channel, 1853.

DESERT HYMN TO THE SUN

I

UNDER the arches of the morning sky,
Save in one heart, there beats no life of Man;
The yellow sand-hills bleak and trackless lie,
And far behind them sleeps the caravan.
A silence, as before Creation, broods
Sublimely o'er the desert solitudes.

II

A silence as if God in Heaven were still,
And meditating some new wonder! Earth
And Air the solemn portent own, and thrill
With awful prescience of the coming birth.
And Night withdraws, and on their silver cars
Wheel to remotest space the trembling Stars.

III

See! an increasing brightness, broad and fleet,
Breaks on the morning in a rosy flood,
As if He smiled to see His work complete,
And rested from it, and pronounced it good.
The sands lie still, and every wind is furled:
The Sun comes up, and looks upon the world.

IV

Is there no burst of music to proclaim
The pomp and majesty of this new lord?—
A golden trumpet in each beam of flame,
Startling the universe with grand accord?
Must Earth be dumb beneath the splendors thrown
From his full orb to glorify her own?

V

No: with an answering splendor, more than sound
Instinct with gratulation, she adores.
With purple flame the porphyry hills are crowned,
And burn with gold the Desert's boundless floors;
And the lone Man compels his haughty knee,
And, prostrate at thy footstool, worships thee.

VI

Before the dreadful glory of thy face;
He veils his sight: he fears the fiery rod
Which thou dost wield amid the brightening space,
As if the sceptre of a visible god.
If not the shadow of God's lustre, thou
Art the one jewel flaming on His brow.

VII

Wrap me within the mantle of thy beams,
And feed my pulses with thy keenest fire!
Here, where thy full meridian deluge streams
Across the Desert, let my blood aspire
To ripen in the vigor of thy blaze,
And catch a warmth to shine through darker days!

VIII

I am alone before thee: Lord of Light!
Begetter of the life of things that live!
Beget in me thy calm, self-balanced might;
To me thine own immortal ardor give.
Yea, though, like her who gave to Jove her charms,
My being wither in thy fiery arms.

IX

Whence came thy splendors? Heaven is filled with thee;
The sky's blue walls are dazzling with thy train;
Thou sitt'st alone in the Immensity,
And in thy lap the World grows young again.

Bathed in such brightness, drunken with the Day,
He deems the Dark forever passed away.

X

But thou dost sheathe thy trenchant sword, and lean
With tempered grandeur towards the western gate;
Shedding thy glory with a brow serene,
And leaving heaven all golden with thy state:
Not as a king discrowned and overthrown,
But one who keeps, and shall reclaim his own.

Indian Ocean, 1853.

NILOTIC DRINKING SONG

I

You may water your bays, brother-poets, with lays
That brighten the cup from the stream you doat on,
By the Schuylkill's side, or Cochituate's tide,
Or the crystal lymph of the mountain Croton:
(We may pledge from these
In our summer ease,
Nor even Anacreon's shade revile us —)
But I, from the flood
Of his own brown blood,
Will drink to the glory of ancient Nilus!

II

Cloud never gave birth, nor cradle the Earth,
To river so grand and fair as this is:
Not the waves that roll us the gold of Pactolus,
Nor cool Cephissus, nor classic Ilissus.
The lily may dip
Her ivory lip
To kiss the ripples of clear Eurotas;
But the Nile brings balm
From the myrrh and palm,
And the ripe, voluptuous lips of the lotus.

III

The waves that ride on his mighty tide
Were poured from the urns of unvisited mountains;
And their sweets of the South mingle cool in the mouth
With the freshness and sparkle of Northern fountains.
Again and again
The goblet we drain, —
Diviner a stream never Nereid swam on:
For Isis and Orus
Have quaffed before us,
And Ganymede dipped it for Jupiter Ammon.

IV

Its blessing he pours o'er his thirsty shores,
And floods the regions of Sleep and Silence,
When he makes oases in desert places,
And the plain is a sea, the hills are islands.
And had I the brave
Anacreon's stave,
And lips like the honeyed lips of Hylas,
I'd dip from his brink
My bacchanal drink,
And sing for the glory of ancient Nilus!

Nile, Ethiopia, 1852.

CAMADEVA

The sun, the moon, the mystic planets seven,
Shone with a purer and serener flame,
And there was joy on Earth and joy in Heaven
When Camadeva came.

The blossoms burst, like jewels of the air,
Putting the colors of the morn to shame;
Breathing their odorous secrets everywhere
When Camadeva came.

The birds, upon the tufted tamarind spray,
Sat side by side and cooed in amorous blame;
The lion sheathed his claws and left his prey
When Camadeva came.

The sea slept, pillowed on the happy shore;
The mountain-peaks were bathed in rosy flame;
The clouds went down the sky, — to mount no more
When Camadeva came.

The hearts of all men brightened like the morn;
The poet's harp then first deserved its fame,
For rapture sweeter than he sang was born
When Camadeva came.

All breathing life a newer spirit quaffed
A second life, a bliss beyond a name,
And Death, half-conquered, dropped his idle shaft
When Camadeva came.

India, 1853.

NUBIA

A LAND of Dreams and Sleep, — a poppied land!
With skies of endless calm above her head,
The drowsy warmth of summer noonday shed
Upon her hills, and silence stern and grand
Throughout her Desert's temple-burying sand.
Before her threshold, in their ancient place,
With closèd lips, and fixed, majestic face
Noteless of Time, her dumb colossi stand.
Oh, pass them not with light, irreverent tread;
Respect the dream that builds her fallen throne,
And soothes her to oblivion of her woes.
Hush! for she does but sleep; she is not dead:
Action and Toil have made the world their own,
But she hath built an altar to Repose.

1853.

KILIMANDJARO

I

HAIL to thee, monarch of African mountains,
Remote, inaccessible, silent, and lone, —
Who, from the heart of the tropical fervors,
Liftest to heaven thine alien snows,
Feeding forever the fountains that make thee
Father of Nile and Creator of Egypt!

II

The years of the world are engraved on thy forehead;
Time's morning blushed red on thy first-fallen snows;
Yet, lost in the wilderness, nameless, unnoted,
Of Man unbeholden, thou wert not till now.
Knowledge alone is the being of Nature,
Giving a soul to her manifold features,
Lighting through paths of the primitive darkness
The footsteps of Truth and the vision of Song.
Knowledge has born thee anew to Creation,
And long-baffled Time at thy baptism rejoices.
Take, then, a name, and be filled with existence,
Yea, be exultant in sovereign glory,
While from the hand of the wandering poet
Drops the first garland of song at thy feet.

III

Floating alone, on the flood of thy making,
Through Africa's mystery, silence, and fire,

Lo! in my palm, like the Eastern enchanter,
I dip from the waters a magical mirror,
And thou art revealed to my purified vision.
I see thee, supreme in the midst of thy co-mates,
Standing alone 'twixt the Earth and the Heavens,
Heir of the Sunset and Herald of Morn.
Zone above zone, to thy shoulders of granite,
The climates of Earth are displayed, as an index,
Giving the scope of the Book of Creation.
There, in the gorges that widen, descending
From cloud and from cold into summer eternal,
Gather the threads of the ice-gendered fountains, —
Gather to riotous torrents of crystal,
And, giving each shelvy recess where they dally
The blooms of the North and its evergreen turfage,
Leap to the land of the lion and lotus!
There, in the wondering airs of the Tropics
Shivers the Aspen, still dreaming of cold:
There stretches the Oak, from the loftiest ledges,
His arms to the far-away lands of his brothers,
And the Pine-tree looks down on his rival, the Palm.

IV

Bathed in the tenderest purple of distance,
Tinted and shadowed by pencils of air,
Thy battlements hang o'er the slopes and the forests,
Seats of the Gods in the limitless ether,
Looming sublimely aloft and afar.
Above them, like folds of imperial ermine,
Sparkle the snow-fields that furrow thy forehead, —
Desolate realms, inaccessible, silent,
Chasms and caverns where Day is a stranger,
Garners where storeth his treasures the Thunder,
The Lightning his falchion, his arrows the Hail!

V

Sovereign Mountain, thy brothers give welcome:
They, the baptized and the crownèd of ages,
Watch-towers of Continents, altars of Earth,
Welcome thee now to their mighty assembly.
Mont Blanc, in the roar of his mad avalanches,
Hails thy accession; superb Orizaba,
Belted with beech and ensandalled with palm;
Chimborazo, the lord of the regions of noonday, —
Mingle their sounds in magnificent chorus
With greeting august from the Pillars of Heaven,
Who, in the urns of the Indian Ganges
Filter the snows of their sacred dominions,
Unmarked with a footprint, unseen but of God.

VI

Lo! unto each is the seal of his lordship,
Nor questioned the right that his majesty giveth:
Each in his lawful supremacy forces
Worship and reverence, wonder and joy.
Absolute all, yet in dignity varied,
None has a claim to the honors of story,
Or the superior splendors of song,
Greater than thou, in thy mystery mantled, —
Thou, the sole monarch of African mountains,
Father of Nile and Creator of Egypt!

White Nile, 1852.

THE BIRTH OF THE PROPHET

I

THRICE three moons had waxed in heaven, thrice three moons had waned away,

Since Abdullah, faint and thirsty, on
the Desert's bosom lay
In the fiery lap of Summer, the merid-
ian of the day; —

II

Since from out the sand upgushing,
lo! a sudden fountain leapt;
Sweet as musk and clear as amber, to
his parching lips it crept.
When he drank it straightway van-
ished, but his blood its virtue
kept.

III

Ere the morn his forehead's lustre,
signet of the Prophet's line,
To the beauty of Amina had trans-
ferred its flame divine;
Of the germ within her sleeping, such
the consecrated sign.

IV

And with every moon that faded waxed
the splendor more and more,
Till Amina's beauty lightened through
the matron veil she wore,
And the tent was filled with glory,
and of Heaven it seemed the
door.

V

When her quickened womb its bur-
den had matured, and Life be-
gan
Struggling in its living prison, through
the wide Creation rang
Premonitions of the coming of a God-
appointed man.

VI

For the oracles of Nature recognize a
Prophet's birth, —
Blossom of the tardy ages, crowning
type of human worth, —
And by miracles and wonders he is
welcomed to the Earth.

VII

Then the stars in heaven grew brighter,
stooping downward from their
zones;
Wheeling round the towers of Mecca,
sang the moon in silver tones,
And the Kaaba's grisly idols trembled
on their granite thrones.

VIII

Mighty arcs of rainbow splendor, pil-
lared shafts of purple fire,
Split the sky and spanned the darkness,
and with many a golden spire,
Beacon-like, from all the mountains
streamed the lambent meteors
higher.

IX

But when first the breath of being to
the sacred infant came,
Paled the pomp of airy lustre, and the
stars grew dim with shame,
For the glory of his countenance out-
shone their feebler flame.

X

Over Nedjid's sands it lightened, unto
Oman's coral deep,
Startling all the gorgeous regions of
the Orient from sleep,
Till, a sun on night new-risen, it il-
lumed the Indian steep.

XI

They who dwelt in Mecca's borders
saw the distant realms appear
All around the vast horizon, shining
marvellous and clear,
From the gardens of Damascus unto
those of Bendemeer.

XII

From the colonnades of Tadmor to
the hills of Hadramaut,
Ancient Araby was lighted, and her
sands the splendor caught,
Till the magic sweep of vision over-
took the track of Thought.

XIII

Such on Earth the wondrous glory,
but beyond the sevenfold skies
God His mansions filled with gladness,
and the seraphs saw arise
Palaces of pearl and ruby from the
founts of Paradise.

XIV

As the surge of heavenly anthems
shook the solemn midnight air,
From the shrines of false religions
came a wailing of despair,
And the fires on Pagan altars were
extinguished everywhere.

"THOU GUARDEST TEMPLE AND VAST PYRAMID" (Page 75)

XV

'Mid the sounds of salutation, 'mid the splendor and the balm,
Knelt the sacred child, proclaiming, with a brow of heavenly calm:
"God is God; there is none other; I his chosen Prophet am!"

Indian Ocean, 1853.

TO THE NILE

Mysterious Flood, — that through the silent sands
Hast wandered, century on century,
Watering the length of great Egyptian lands,
Which were not, but for thee, —

Art thou the keeper of that eldest lore,
Written ere yet thy hieroglyphs began
When dawned upon thy fresh, untrampled shore
The earliest life of Man?

Thou guardest temple and vast pyramid
Where the gray Past records its ancient speech;
But in thine unrevealing breast lies hid
What they refuse to teach.

All other streams with human joys and fears
Run blended, o'er the plains of History:
Thou tak'st no note of Man; a thousand years
Are as a day to thee.

What were to thee the Osirian festivals?
Or Memnon's music on the Theban plain?
The carnage, when Cambyses made thy halls
Ruddy with royal slain?

Even then thou wast a God, and shrines were built
For worship of thine own majestic flood;
For thee the incense burned, — for thee was spilt
The sacrificial blood.

And past the bannered pylons that arose
Above thy palms, the pageantry and state,
Thy current flowed, calmly as now it flows,
Unchangeable as Fate.

Thou givest blessing as a God might give,
Whose being is his bounty: from the slime
Shaken from off thy skirts the nations live,
Through all the years of Time.

In thy solemnity, thine awful calm,
Thy grand indifference of Destiny,
My soul forgets its pain, and drinks the balm
Which thou dost proffer me.

Thy godship is unquestioned still: I bring
No doubtful worship to thy shrine supreme;
But thus my homage as a chaplet fling,
To float upon thy stream!

1854.

HASSAN TO HIS MARE

Come, my beauty! come, my desert darling!
On my shoulder lay thy glossy head!
Fear not, though the barley-sack be empty,
Here's the half of Hassan's scanty bread.

Thou shalt have thy share of dates, my beauty!
And thou know'st my water-skin is free:
Drink and welcome, for the wells are distant,
And my strength and safety lie in thee.

Bend thy forehead now, to take my kisses!
Lift in love thy dark and splendid eye:
Thou art glad when Hassan mounts the saddle, —
Thou art proud he owns thee: so am I.

Let the Sultan bring his boasted horses,
Prancing with their diamond-studded reins;
They, my darling, shall not match thy fleetness
When they course with thee the desert-plains!

Let the Sultan bring his famous horses,
Let him bring his golden swords to me, —
Bring his slaves, his eunuchs, and his harem;
He would offer them in vain for thee.

We have seen Damascus, O my beauty!
And the splendor of the Pashas there:
What 's their pomp and riches? Why, I would not
Take them for a handful of thy hair!

Khaled sings the praises of his mistress,
And, because I've none, he pities me.
What care I if he should have a thousand,
Fairer than the morning? *I* have thee.

He will find his passion growing cooler,
Should her glance on other suitors fall;
Thou wilt ne'er, my mistress and my darling,
Fail to answer at thy master's call.

By and by some snow-white Nedjid stallion
Shall to thee his spring-time ardor bring;
And a foal, the fairest of the Desert,
To thy milky dugs shall crouch and cling.

Then, when Khaled shows to me his children,
I shall laugh, and bid him look at thine;
Thou wilt neigh, and lovingly caress me,
With thy glossy neck laid close to mine.

1854.

CHARMIAN

I

O Daughter of the Sun;
Who gave the keys of passion unto thee?
Who taught the powerful sorcery
Wherein my soul, too willing to be won,
Still feebly struggles to be free,
But more than half undone?
Within the mirror of thine eyes,
Full of the sleep of warm Egyptian skies, —
The sleep of lightning, bound in airy spell,
And deadlier, because invisible, —
I see the reflex of a feeling
Which was not, till I looked on thee:
A power, involved in mystery,
That shrinks, affrighted, from its own revealing.

II

Thou sitt'st in stately indolence,
Too calm to feel a breath of passion start
The listless fibres of thy sense,
The fiery slumber of thy heart.
Thine eyes are wells of darkness, by the veil
Of languid lids half-sealed: the pale
And bloodless olive of thy face,
And the full, silent lips that wear
A ripe serenity of grace,
Are dark beneath the shadow of thy hair.
Not from the brow of templed Athor beams
Such tropic warmth along the path of dreams;

Not from the lips of hornèd Isis flows
Such sweetness of repose!
For thou art Passion's self, a goddess too,
And aught but worship never knew;
And thus thy glances, calm and sure,
Look for accustomed homage, and betray
No effort to assert thy sway:
Thou deem'st my fealty secure.

III

O Sorceress! those looks unseal
The undisturbèd mysteries that press
Too deep in nature for the heart to feel
Their terror and their loveliness.
Thine eyes are torches that illume
On secret shrines their unforeboded fires,
And fill the vaults of silence and of gloom
With the unresting life of new desires.
I follow where their arrowy ray
Pierces the veil I would not tear away,
And with a dread, delicious awe behold
Another gate of life unfold,
Like the rapt neophyte who sees
Some march of grand Osirian mysteries.
The startled chambers I explore,
And every entrance open lies,
Forced by the magic thrill that runs before
Thy slowly-lifted eyes.
I tremble to the centre of my being
Thus to confess the spirit's poise o'erthrown,
And all its guiding virtues blown
Like leaves before the whirlwind's fury fleeing.

IV

But see! one memory rises in my soul,
And, beaming steadily and clear,
Scatters the lurid thunder-clouds that roll
Through Passion's sultry atmosphere.
An alchemy more potent borrow
For thy dark eyes, enticing Sorceress!
For on the casket of a sacred Sorrow
Their shafts fall powerless.
Nay, frown not, Athor, from thy mystic shrine:
Strong Goddess of Desire, I will not be
One of the myriad slaves thou callest thine,
To cast my manhood's crown of royalty
Before thy dangerous beauty: I am free!

East Indies, 1853.

SMYRNA

The "Ornament of Asia" and the "Crown
Of fair Ionia." Yea; but Asia stands
No more an empress, and Ionia's hands
Have lost their sceptre. Thou, majestic town,
Art as a diamond on a faded robe:
The freshness of thy beauty scatters yet
The radiance of that sun of Empire set,
Whose disk sublime illumed the ancient globe.
Thou sitt'st between the mountains and the sea;
The sea and mountains flatter thine array,
And fill thy courts with Grandeur, not Decay;
And Power, not Death, proclaims thy cypress tree.
Through thee, the sovereign symbols Nature lent
Her rise, make Asia's fall magnificent.

1851.

TO A PERSIAN BOY

IN THE BAZAAR AT SMYRNA

The gorgeous blossoms of that magic tree
Beneath whose shade I sat a thousand nights,
Breathed from their opening petals all delights
Embalmed in spice of Orient Poesy,
When first, young Persian, I beheld thine eyes,
And felt the wonder of thy beauty grow
Within my brain, as some fair planet's glow

Deepens, and fills the summer evening skies.
From under thy dark lashes shone on me
The rich, voluptuous soul of Eastern land,
Impassioned, tender, calm, serenely sad, —
Such as immortal Hafiz felt when he
Sang by the fountain-streams of Rocnabad,
Or in the bowers of blissful Samarcand.

1851.

THE ARAB TO THE PALM

Next to thee, O fair gazelle,
O Beddowee girl, beloved so well;

Next to the fearless Nedjidee,
Whose fleetness shall bear me again to thee;

Next to ye both I love the Palm,
With his leaves of beauty, his fruit of balm;

Next to ye both I love the Tree
Whose fluttering shadow wraps us three
With love, and silence, and mystery!

Our tribe is many, our poets vie
With any under the Arab sky;
Yet none can sing of the Palm but I.

The marble minarets that begem
Cairo's citadel-diadem
Are not so light as his slender stem.

He lifts his leaves in the sunbeam's glance
As the Almehs lift their arms in dance, —

A slumberous motion, a passionate sign,
That works in the cells of the blood like wine.

Full of passion and sorrow is he,
Dreaming where the beloved may be.

And when the warm south-winds arise,
He breathes his longing in fervid sighs, —

Quickening odors, kisses of balm,
That drop in the lap of his chosen palm.

The sun may flame and the sands may stir,
But the breath of his passion reaches her.

O Tree of Love, by that love of thine,
Teach me how I shall soften mine!

Give me the secret of the sun,
Whereby the wooed is ever won!

If I were a King, O stately Tree,
A likeness, glorious as might be,
In the court of my palace I'd build for thee!

With a shaft of silver, burnished bright,
And leaves of beryl and malachite;

With spikes of golden bloom ablaze,
And fruits of topaz and chrysoprase:

And there the poets, in thy praise,
Should night and morning frame new lays, —

New measures sung to tunes divine,
But none, O Palm, should equal mine!

Off Japan, 1853.

AURUM POTABILE

I

Brother Bards of every region, —
Brother Bards, (your name is Legion!)
Were you with me while the twilight
Darkens up my pine-tree skylight, —
Were you gathered, representing
Every land beneath the sun,
O, what songs would be indited,
Ere the earliest star is lighted,
To the praise of vino d'oro,
On the Hills of Lebanon!

II

Yes; while all alone I quaff its
Lucid gold, and brightly laugh its
Topaz waves and amber bubbles,
Still the thought my pleasure troubles,
That I quaff it all alone.
O for Hafiz, — glorious Persian!
Keats, with buoyant, gay diversion
Mocking Schiller's grave immersion;
O for wreathed Anacreon!
Yet enough to have the living, —
They, the few, the rapture-giving!
(Blessèd more than in receiving,)
Fate, that frowns when laurels wreathe them,
Once the solace might bequeath them,
Once to taste of vino d'oro
On the Hills of Lebanon!

III

Lebanon, thou mount of story,
Well we know thy sturdy glory,
Since the days of Solomon;
Well we know the Five old Cedars,
Scarred by ages, — silent pleaders,
Preaching, in their gray sedateness,
Of thy forest's fallen greatness,
Of the vessels of the Tyrian,
And the palaces Assyrian,
And the temple on Moriah
To the High and Holy One!
Know the wealth of thy appointment, —
Myrrh and aloes, gum and ointment;
But we knew not, till we clomb thee,
Of the nectar dropping from thee, —
Of the pure, pellucid Ophir
In the cups of vino d'oro,
On the Hills of Lebanon!

IV

We have drunk, and we have eaten,
Where Egyptian sheaves are beaten;
Tasted Judah's milk and honey
On his mountains, bare and sunny;
Drained ambrosial bowls, that ask us
Never more to leave Damascus;
And have sung a vintage pæan
To the grapes of isles Ægean,
And the flasks of Orvieto,
Ripened in the Roman sun:
But the liquor here surpasses
All that beams in earthly glasses.
'T is of this that Paracelsus
(His elixir vitæ) tells us,
That to happier shores can float us
Than Lethean stems of lotus,
And the vigor of the morning
Straight restores when day is done.
Then, before the sunset waneth,
While the rosy tide, that staineth
Earth, and sky, and sea, remaineth,
We will take the fortune proffered, —
Ne'er again to be re-offered,
We will drink of vino d'oro,
On the Hills of Lebanon!
Vino d'oro! vino d'oro! —
Golden blood of Lebanon!

1853.

ON THE SEA

The splendor of the sinking moon
Deserts the silent bay;
The mountain-isles loom large and faint,
Folded in shadows gray,
And the lights of land are setting stars
That soon will pass away.

O boatman, cease thy mellow song!
O minstrel, drop thy lyre!
Let us hear the voice of the midnight sea,
Let us speak as the waves inspire,
While the plashy dip of the languid oar
Is a furrow of silver fire.

Day cannot make thee half so fair,
Nor the stars of eve so dear:
The arms that clasp and the breast that keeps,
They tell me thou art near,
And the perfect beauty of thy face
In thy murmured words I hear.

The lights of land have dropped below
The vast and glimmering sea;
The world we leave is a tale that is told, —
A fable, that cannot be.
There is no life in the sphery dark
But the love in thee and me!

Macao, 1853.

TYRE

I

THE wild and windy morning is lit
with lurid fire ;
The thundering surf of ocean beats on
the rocks of Tyre, —
Beats on the fallen columns and round
the headland roars,
And hurls its foamy volume along the
hollow shores,
And calls with hungry clamor, that
speaks its long desire :
"Where are the ships of Tarshish, the
mighty ships of Tyre ?"

II

Within her cunning harbor, choked
with invading sand,
No galleys bring their freightage, the
spoils of every land,
And like a prostrate forest, when au-
tumn gales have blown,
Her colonnades of granite lie shattered
and o'erthrown ;
And from the reef the pharos no longer
flings its fire,
To beacon home from Tarshish the
lordly ships of Tyre.

III

Where is thy rod of empire, once
mighty on the waves, —
Thou that thyself exalted, till Kings
bacame thy slaves ?
Thou that didst speak to nations, and
saw thy will obeyed, —
Whose favor made them joyful, whose
anger sore afraid, —
Who laid'st thy deep foundations, and
thought them strong and sure,
And boasted midst the waters, Shall I
not aye endure ?

IV

Where is the wealth of ages that
heaped thy princely mart ?
The pomp of purple trappings ; the
gems of Syrian art ;
The silken goats of Kedar ; Sabæa's
spicy store ;
The tributes of the islands thy squad-
rons homeward bore,
When in thy gates triumphant they
entered from the sea
With sound of horn and sackbut, of
harp and psaltery ?

V

Howl, howl, ye ships of Tarshish ! the
glory is laid waste :
There is no habitation ; the mansions
are defaced.
No mariners of Sidon unfurl your
mighty sails ;
No workmen fell the fir-trees that grow
in Shenir's vales
And Bashan's oaks that boasted a
thousand years of sun,
Or hew the masts of cedar on frosty
Lebanon.

VI

Rise, thou forgotten harlot ! take up
thy harp and sing :
Call the rebellious islands to own their
ancient king :
Bare to the spray thy bosom, and with
thy hair unbound,
Sit on the piles of ruin, thou throne-
less and discrowned !
There mix thy voice of wailing with
the thunders of the sea,
And sing thy songs of sorrow, that
thou remembered be !

VII

Though silent and forgotten, yet
Nature still laments
The pomp and power departed, the
lost magnificence :
The hills were proud to see thee, and
they are sadder now ;
The sea was proud to bear thee, and
wears a troubled brow,
And evermore the surges chant forth
their vain desire :
"Where are the ships of Tarshish, the
mighty ships of Tyre ?"

Indian Ocean, 1853.

AN ANSWER

You call me cold : you wonder why
The marble of a mien like mine
Gives fiery sparks of Poesy,
Or softens at Love's touch divine.

Go, look on Nature, you will find
It is the rock that feels the sun :
But you are blind, — and to the
blind
The touch of ice and fire is one.

1852.

GULISTAN

AN ARABIC METRE

WHERE is Gulistan, the Land of Roses?
Not on hills where Northern winters
Break their spears in icy splinters,
And in shrouded snow the world reposes;
But amid the glow and splendor
Which the Orient summers lend her,
Blue the heaven above her beauty closes:
There is Gulistan, the Land of Roses.

Northward stand the Persian mountains;
Southward spring the silver fountains
Which to Hafiz taught his sweetest measures,
Clearly ringing to the singing
Which the nightingales delight in,
When the spring, from Oman winging
Unto Shiraz, showers her fragrant treasures
On the land, till valleys brighten,
Mountains lighten with returning
Fires of scarlet poppy burning,
And the stream meanders
Through its roseate oleanders,
And Love's golden gate, unfolden,
Opens on a universe of pleasures.

There the sunshine blazes over
Meadows gemmed with ruby clover;
There the rose's heart uncloses,
Prodigal with hoarded stores of sweetness,
And the lily's cup so still is
Where the river's waters quiver,
That no wandering air can spill his
Honeyed balm, or blight his beauty's fleetness.
Skies are fairest, days are rarest,—
Thou, O Earth! a glory wearest
From the ecstasy thou bearest,
Once to feel the Summer's full completeness.

Twilight glances, moonlit dances,
Song by starlight, there entrances
Youthful hearts with fervid fancies,
And the blushing rose of Love uncloses:
Love that, lapped in summer joyance,
Far from every rude annoyance,
Calmly on the answering love reposes;
And in song, in music only
Speaks the longing, vague and lonely,
Which to pain is there the nearest,
Yet of joys the sweetest, dearest,
As a cloud when skies are clearest
On its folds intenser light discloses:
This is Gulistan, the Land of Roses.

1853.

L'ENVOI

UNTO the Desert and the Desert steed
Farewell! The journey is completed now:
Struck are the tents of Ishmael's wandering breed,
And I unwind the turban from my brow.

The sun has ceased to shine; the palms that bent,
Inebriate with light, have disappeared;
And naught is left me of the Orient
But the tanned bosom and the unshorn beard.

Yet from that life my blood a glow retains,
As the red sunshine in the ruby glows;
These songs are echoes of its fiercer strains,—
Dreams, that recall its passion and repose.

I found, among those Children of the Sun,
The cipher of my nature,—the release
Of baffled powers, which else had never won
That free fulfilment, whose reward is peace.

For not to any race or any clime
  Is the completed sphere of life revealed;
He who would make his own that round sublime,
  Must pitch his tent on many a distant field.

Upon his home a dawning lustre beams,
  But through the world he walks to open day,
Gathering from every land the prismal gleams,
  Which, when united, form the perfect ray.

Go, therefore, Songs! — which in the East were born
  And drew your nurture — from your sire's control:
Haply to wander through the West forlorn,
  Or find a shelter in some Orient soul.

And if the temper of our colder sky
  Less warmth of passion and of speech demands,
They are the blossoms of my life, — and I
  Have ripened in the suns of many lands.

1854.

LATER POEMS

LYRICS

1854–1860

PORPHYROGENITUS

I

Born in the purple! born in the purple!
Heir to the sceptre and crown!
Lord over millions and millons of vassals, —
Monarch of mighty renown!
Where, do you ask, are my banner-proud castles?
Where my imperial town?

II

Where are the ranks of my far-flashing lances, —
Trumpets, courageous of sound, —
Galloping squadrons and rocking armadas,
Guarding my kingdom around?
Where are the pillars that blazon my borders,
Threatening the alien ground?

III

Vainly you ask, if you wear not the purple,
Sceptre and diadem own;
Ruling, yourself, over prosperous regions,
Seated supreme on your throne.
Subjects have nothing to give but allegiance:
Monarchs meet monarchs alone.

IV

But, if a king, you shall stand on my ramparts,
Look on the lands that I sway,
Number the domes of magnificent cities,
Shining in valleys away, —
Number the mountains whose foreheads are golden,
Lakes that are azure with day.

V

Whence I inherited such a dominion?
What was my forefathers' line?
Homer and Sophocles, Pindar and Sappho,
First were anointed divine:
Theirs were the realms that a god might have governed,
Ah, and how little is mine!

VI

Hafiz in Orient shared with Petrarca
Thrones of the East and the West;
Shakespeare succeeded to limitless empire,
Greatest of monarchs, and best:
Few of his children inherited kingdoms,
Provinces only, the rest.

VII

Keats has his vineyards, and Shelley his islands;
Coleridge in Xanadu reigns;
Wordsworth is eyried aloft on the mountains,
Goethe has mountains and plains;
Yet, though the world has been parcelled among them,
A world to be parcelled remains.

VIII

Blessing enough to be born in the purple,
Though but a monarch in name, —
Though in the desert my palace is builded,
Far from the highways of Fame:

Up with my standards! salute me with
trumpets!
Crown me with regal acclaim!
1855.

THE SONG OF THE CAMP

"GIVE us a song!" the soldiers cried,
The outer trenches guarding,
When the heated guns of the camps
allied
Grew weary of bombarding.

The dark Redan, in silent scoff,
Lay, grim and threatening, under;
And the tawny mound of the Mala-
koff
No longer belched its thunder.

There was a pause. A guardsman
said
"We storm the forts to-morrow;
Sing while we may, another day
Will bring enough of sorrow."

They lay along the battery's side,
Below the smoking cannon:
Brave hearts, from Severn and from
Clyde,
And from the banks of Shannon.

They sang of love, and not of fame;
Forgot was Britain's glory:
Each heart recalled a different name,
But all sang "Annie Laurie."

Voice after voice caught up the song,
Until its tender passion
Rose like an anthem, rich and
strong, —
Their battle-eve confession.

Dear girl, her name he dared not
speak,
But, as the song grew louder,
Something upon the soldier's cheek
Washed off the stains of powder.

Beyond the darkening ocean burned
The bloody sunset's embers,
While the Crimean valleys learned
How English love remembers.

And once again a fire of hell
Rained on the Russian quarters,
With scream of shot, and burst of shell,
And bellowing of the mortars!

And Irish Nora's eyes are dim
For a singer, dumb and gory;
And English Mary mourns for him
Who sang of "Annie Laurie."

Sleep, soldiers! still in honored rest
Your truth and valor wearing:
The bravest are the tenderest, —
The loving are the daring.
1856.

ICARUS

I

Io TRIUMPHE! Lo, thy certain art,
My crafty sire, releases us at length!
False Minos now may knit his baffled
brows,
And in the labyrinth by thee devised
His brutish horns in angry search may
toss
The Minotaur, — but thou and I are
free!
See where it lies, one dark spot on the
breast
Of plains far-shining in the long-lost
day,
Thy glory and our prison! Either
hand
Crete, with her hoary mountains, olive-clad
In twinkling silver, 'twixt the vine-
yard rows,
Divides the glimmering seas. On
Ida's top
The sun, discovering first an earthly
throne,
Sits down in splendor; lucent vapors
rise
From folded glens among the awak-
ing hills,
Expand their hovering films, and
touch, and spread
In airy planes beneath us, hearths of
air
Whereon the Morning burns her hun-
dred fires.

II

Take thou thy way between the cloud
and wave.
O Dædalus, my father, steering forth

To friendly Samos, or the Carian shore!
But me the spaces of the upper heaven
Attract, the height, the freedom, and the joy.
For now, from that dark treachery escaped,
And tasting power which was the lust of youth,
Whene'er the white blades of the sea-gull's wings
Flashed round the headland, or the barbèd files
Of cranes returning clanged across the sky,
No half-way flight, no errand incomplete
I purpose. Not, as once in dreams, with pain
I mount, with fear and huge exertion hold
Myself a moment, ere the sickening fall
Breaks in the shock of waking. Launched, at last,
Uplift on powerful wings, I veer and float
Past sunlit isles of cloud, that dot with light
The boundless archipelago of sky.
I fan the airy silence till it starts
In rustling whispers, swallowed up as soon;
I warm the chilly ether with my breath;
I with the beating of my heart make glad
The desert blue. Have I not raised myself
Unto this height, and shall I cease to soar?
The curious eagles wheel about my path:
With sharp and questioning eyes they stare at me,
With harsh, impatient screams they menace me,
Who, with these vans of cunning workmanship
Broad-spread, adventure on their high domain, —
Now mine, as well. Henceforth, ye clamorous birds,
I claim the azure empire of the air!
Henceforth I breast the current of the morn,
Between her crimson shores: a star, henceforth,
Upon the crawling dwellers of the earth
My forehead shines. The steam of sacred blood,
The smoke of burning flesh on altars laid,
Fumes of the temple-wine, and sprinkled myrrh,
Shall reach my palate ere they reach the Gods.

III

Nay, am not I a God? What other wing,
If not a God's, could in the rounded sky
Hang thus in solitary poise? What need,
Ye proud Immortals, that my balanced plumes
Should grow, like yonder eagle's from the nest?
It may be, ere my crafty father's line
Sprang from Erectheus, some artificer,
Who found you roaming wingless on the hills,
Naked, asserting godship in the dearth
Of loftier claimants, fashioned you the same.
Thence did you seize Olympus: thence your pride
Compelled the race of men, your slaves, to tear
The temple from the mountain's marble womb,
To carve you shapes more beautiful than they,
To sate your idle nostrils with the reek
Of gums and spices, heaped on jewelled gold.

IV

Lo, where Hyperion, through the glowing air
Approaching, drives! Fresh from his banquet-meats,
Flushed with Olympian nectar, angrily
He guides his fourfold span of furious steeds,
Convoyed by that bold Hour whose ardent torch
Burns up the dew, toward the narrow beach,

This long, projecting spit of cloudy gold
Whereon I wait to greet him when he comes.
Think not I fear thine anger: this day, thou,
Lord of the silver bow, shalt bring a guest
To sit in presence of the equal Gods
In your high hall: wheel but thy chariot near,
That I may mount beside thee!
—— What is this?
I hear the crackling hiss of singèd plumes!
The stench of burning feathers stifles me!
My loins are stung with drops of molten wax! —
Ai! ai! my ruined vans! — I fall! I die!
. . . . . .
Ere the blue noon o'erspanned the bluer strait
Which parts Icaria from Samos, fell,
Amid the silent wonder of the air,
Fell with a shock that startled the still wave,
A shrivelled wreck of crisp, entangled plumes,
A head whence eagles' beaks had plucked the eyes,
And clots of wax, black limbs by eagles torn
In falling: and a circling eagle screamed
Around that floating horror of the sea
Derision, and above Hyperion shone.

1860.

THE BATH

Off, fetters of the falser life, —
Weeds, that conceal the statue's form!
This silent world with truth is rife,
This wooing air is warm.

Now fall the thin disguises, planned
For men too weak to walk unblamed:
Naked beside the sea I stand, —
Naked and not ashamed.

Where yonder dancing billows dip,
Far-off, to ocean's misty verge,
Ploughs Morning, like a full-sailed ship,
The Orient's cloudy surge.

With spray of scarlet fire before
The ruffled gold that round her dies,
She sails above the sleeping shore,
Across the waking skies.

The dewy beach beneath her glows;
A pencilled beam, the lighthouse burns:
Full-breathed, the fragrant sea-wind blows, —
Life to the world returns!

I stand, a spirit newly-born,
White-limbed and pure, and strong, and fair;
The first-begotten son of Morn,
The nursling of the air!

There, in a heap, the masks of Earth,
The cares, the sins, the griefs, are thrown:
Complete, as through diviner birth,
I walk the sands alone.

With downy hands the winds caress,
With frothy lips the amorous sea,
As welcoming the nakedness
Of vanished gods, in me.

Along the ridged and sloping sand,
Where headlands clasp the crescent cove,
A shining spirit of the land,
A snowy shape, I move:

Or, plunged in hollow-rolling brine,
In emerald cradles rocked and swung,
The sceptre of the sea is mine,
And mine his endless song.

For Earth with primal dew is wet,
Her long-lost child to rebaptize;
Her fresh, immortal Edens yet
Their Adam recognize.

Her ancient freedom is his fee;
Her ancient beauty is his dower:
She bares her ample breasts, that he
May suck the milk of power.

Press on, ye hounds of life, that lurk
So close, to seize your harried prey;

Ye fiends of Custom, Gold, and Work, —
I hear your distant bay!

And, like the Arab, when he bears
To the insulted camel's path
His garment, which the camel tears,
And straight forgets his wrath;

So, yonder badges of your sway,
Life's paltry husks, to you I give:
Fall on, and in your blindness say:
We hold the fugitive!

But leave to me this brief escape
To simple manhood, pure and free, —
A child of God, in God's own shape,
Between the land and sea!

1860.

THE FOUNTAIN OF TREVI

The Coliseum lifts at night
Its broken cells more proudly far
Than in the noonday's naked light,
For every rent enshrines a star:
On Cæsar's hill the royal Lar
Presides within his mansion old:
Decay and Death no longer mar
The moon's atoning mist of gold.

Still lingering near the shrines renewed,
We sadly, fondly, look our last;
Each trace concealed of spoilage rude
From old or late iconoclast,
Till, Trajan's whispering forum passed,
We hear the waters, showering bright,
Of Trevi's ancient fountain, cast
Their woven music on the night.

The Genius of the Tiber nods
Benign, above his tilted urn;
Kneel down and drink! the beckoning gods
This last libation will not spurn.
Drink, and the old enchantment learn
That hovers yet o'er Trevi's foam, —
The promise of a sure return,
Fresh footsteps in the dust of Rome!

Kneel down and drink! the golden days
Here lived and dreamed, shall dawn again:
Albano's hill, through purple haze,
Again shall crown the Latin plain.
Whatever stains of Time remain,
Left by the years that intervene,
Lo! Trevi's fount shall toss its rain
To wash the pilgrim's forehead clean.

Drink, and depart! for Life is just:
She gives to Faith a master-key
To ope the gate of dreams august,
And take from joys in memory
The certainty of joys to be:
And Trevi's basins shall be bare
Ere we again shall fail to see
Their silver in the Roman air.

1860.

PROPOSAL

The violet loves a sunny bank,
The cowslip loves the lea;
The scarlet creeper loves the elm,
But I love — thee.

The sunshine kisses mount and vale,
The stars, they kiss the sea;
The west winds kiss the clover bloom,
But I kiss — thee!

The oriole weds his mottled mate;
The lily 's bride o' the bee;
Heaven's marriage-ring is round the earth —
Shall I wed thee?

1859.

THE PALM AND THE PINE

When Peter led the First Crusade,
A Norseman wooed an Arab maid.

He loved her lithe and palmy grace,
And the dark beauty of her face:

She loved his cheeks, so ruddy fair,
His sunny eyes and yellow hair.

He called: she left her father's tent;
She followed wheresoe'er he went.

She left the palms of Palestine
To sit beneath the Norland pine.

She sang the musky Orient strains
Where Winter swept the snowy plains.

Their natures met like Night and Morn
What time the morning-star is born.

The child that from their meeting grew
Hung, like that star, between the two.

The glossy night his mother shed
From her long hair was on his head:

But in its shade they saw arise
The morning of his father's eyes.

Beneath the Orient's tawny stain
Wandered the Norseman's crimson vein:

Beneath the Northern force was seen
The Arab sense, alert and keen.

His were the Viking's sinewy hands,
The arching foot of Eastern lands.

And in his soul conflicting strove
Northern indifference, Southern love;

The chastity of temperate blood,
Impetuous passion's fiery flood;

The settled faith that nothing shakes,
The jealousy a breath awakes;

The planning Reason's sober gaze,
And fancy's meteoric blaze.

And stronger, as he grew to man,
The contradicting natures ran, —

As mingled streams from Etna flow,
One born of fire, and one of snow.

And one impelled, and one withheld,
And one obeyed, and one rebelled.

One gave him force, the other fire;
This self-control, and that desire.

One filled his heart with fierce unrest;
With peace serene the other blessed.

He knew the depth and knew the height,
The bounds of darkness and of light;

And who these far extremes has seen
Must needs know all that lies between.

So, with untaught, instinctive art,
He read the myriad-natured heart.

He met the men of many a land;
They gave their souls into his hand;

And none of them was long unknown
The hardest lesson was his own.

But how he lived, and where, and when
It matters not to other men;

For, as a fountain disappears,
To gush again in later years,

So hidden blood may find the day,
When centuries have rolled away;

And fresher lives betray at last
The lineage of a far-off Past.

That nature, mixed of sun and snow
Repeats its ancient ebb and flow:

The children of the Palm and Pine
Renew their blended lives — in mine.

1855.

THE VINEYARD-SAINT

She, pacing down the vineyard walks,
Put back the branches, one by one,
Stripped the dry foliage from the stalks,
And gave their bunches to the sun.

On fairer hillsides, looking south,
The vines were brown with cankerous rust,
The earth was hot with summer drouth,
And all the grapes were dim with dust.

Yet here some blessed influence rained
From kinder skies, the season through;

On every bunch the bloom remained,
And every leaf was washed in dew.

I saw her blue eyes, clear and calm;
I saw the aureole of her hair;
I heard her chant some unknown psalm,
In triumph half, and half in prayer.

"Hail, maiden of the vines!" I cried:
"Hail, Oread of the purple hill!
For vineyard fauns too fair a bride,
For me thy cup of welcome fill!

"Unlatch the wicket; let me in,
And, sharing, make thy toil more dear:
No riper vintage holds the bin
Than that our feet shall trample here.

"Beneath thy beauty's light I glow,
As in the sun those grapes of thine:
Touch thou my heart with love, and lo!
The foaming must is turned to wine!"

She, pausing, stayed her careful task,
And, lifting eyes of steady ray,
Blew, as a wind the mountain's mask
Of mist, my cloudy words away.

No troubled flush o'erran her cheek;
But when her quiet lips did stir,
My heart knelt down to hear her speak,
And mine the blush I sought in her.

"Oh, not for me," she said, "the vow
So lightly breathed, to break erelong;
The vintage-garland on the brow;
The revels of the dancing throng!

"To maiden love I shut my heart,
Yet none the less a stainless bride;
I work alone, I dwell apart,
Because my work is sanctified.

"A virgin hand must tend the vine,
By virgin feet the vat be trod,
Whose consecrated gush of wine
Becomes the blessed blood of God!

"No sinful purple here shall stain,
Nor juice profane these grapes afford;
But reverent lips their sweetness drain
Around the Table of the Lord.

"The cup I fill, of chaster gold,
Upon the lighted altar stands;
There, when the gates of heaven unfold,
The priest exalts it in his hands.

"The censer yields adoring breath,
The awful anthem sinks and dies,
While God, who suffered life and death,
Renews His ancient sacrifice.

"O sacred garden of the vine!
And blessed she, ordained to press
God's chosen vintage, for the wine
Of pardon and of holiness!"

1860.

ON LEAVING CALIFORNIA

O FAIR young land, the youngest, fairest far
Of which our world can boast, —
Whose guardian planet, Evening's silver star
Illumes thy golden coast, —

How art thou conquered, tamed in all the pride
Of savage beauty still!
How brought, O panther of the splendid hide,
To know thy master's will!

No more thou sittest on thy tawny hills
In indolent repose;
Or pour'st the crystal of a thousand rills
Down from thy house of snows.

But where the wild-oats wrapped thy knees in gold,
The ploughman drives his share,
And where, through cañons deep, thy streams are rolled,
The miner's arm is bare.

Yet in thy lap, thus rudely rent and torn
A nobler seed shall be;

Mother of mighty men, thou shalt not mourn
Thy lost virginity!

Thy human children shall restore the grace
Gone with thy fallen pines:
The wild, barbaric beauty of thy face
Shall round to classic lines.

And Order, Justice, Social Law shall curb
Thy untamed energies;
And Art and Science, with their dreams superb,
Replace thine ancient ease.

The marble, sleeping in thy mountains now,
Shall live in sculptures rare;
Thy native oak shall crown the sage's brow, —
Thy bay, the poet's hair.

Thy tawny hills shall bleed their purple wine,
Thy valleys yield their oil;
And Music, with her eloquence divine,
Persuade thy sons to toil.

Till Hesper, as he trims his silver beam,
No happier land shall see,
And Earth shall find her old Arcadian dream
Restored again in thee!

1859.

WIND AND SEA

I

The sea is a jovial comrade,
He laughs wherever he goes;
His merriment shines in the dimpling lines
That wrinkle his hale repose;
He lays himself down at the feet of the Sun,
And shakes all over with glee,
And the broad-backed billows fall faint on the shore,
In the mirth of the mighty Sea!

II

But the Wind is sad and restless,
And cursed with an inward pain;
You may hark as you will, by valley or hill,
But you hear him still complain.
He wails on the barren mountains,
And shrieks on the wintry sea;
He sobs in the cedar, and moans in the pine,
And shudders all over the aspen tree.

III

Welcome are both their voices,
And I know not which is best, —
The laughter that slips from the Ocean's lips,
Or the comfortless Wind's unrest.
There 's a pang in all rejoicing,
A joy in the heart of pain,
And the Wind that saddens, the Sea that gladdens,
Are singing the selfsame strain.

1855.

MY DEAD

Give back the soul of youth once more!
The years are fleeting fast away,
And this brown hair will soon be gray,
These cheeks be pale and furrowed o'er.

Ah, no, the child is long since dead,
Whose light feet spurred the laggard years,
Who breathed in future atmospheres,
Ere Youth's eternal Present fled.

Dead lies the boy, whose timid eye
Shunned every face that spake not love;
Whose simple vision looked above,
And saw a glory in the sky.

And now the youth has sighed his last;
I see him cold upon his bier,
But in these eyes there is no tear:
He joins his brethren of the Past.

'T was time he died: the gates of Art
Had shut him from the temple's shrine,
And now I climb her mount divine,
But with the sinews, not the heart.

How many more, O Life! shall I
In future offer up to thee?
And shall they perish utterly,
Upon whose graves I clomb so high?

Say, shall I not at last attain
Some height, from whence the Past is clear,
In whose immortal atmosphere
I shall behold my Dead again?

1855.

THE LOST CROWN

You ask me why I sometimes drop
The threads of talk I weave with you,
And midway in expression stop
As if a sudden trumpet blew.

It is because a trumpet blows
From steeps your feet will never climb:
It calls my soul from present woes
To rule some buried realm of Time.

Wide open swing the guarded gates,
That shut from you the vales of dawn;
And there my car of triumph waits,
By white, immortal horses drawn.

A throne of gold the wheels uphold,
Each spoke a ray of jewelled fire:
The crimson banners float unrolled,
Or falter when the winds expire.

Lo! where the valley's bed expands,
Through cloudy censer-smoke, upcurled —
The avenue to distant lands —
The single landscape of a world!

I mount the throne; I seize the rein;
Between the shouting throngs I go,
The millions crowding hill and plain,
And now a thousand trumpets blow!

The armies of the world are there,
The pomp, the beauty, and the power,
Far-shining through the dazzled air,
To crown the triumph of the hour.

Enthroned aloft, I seem to float
On wide, victorious wings upborne,
Past the rich vale's expanding throat,
To where the palace burns with morn.

My limbs dilate, my breast expands,
A starry fire is in my eye;
I ride above the subject lands,
A god beneath the hollow sky.

Peal out, ye clarions! shout, ye throngs,
Beneath your banners' reeling folds!
This pageantry to me belongs, —
My hand its proper sceptre holds.

Surge on, in still augmenting lines,
Till the great plain be overrun,
And my procession far outshines
The bended pathway of the sun!

But when my triumph overtops
This language, which from vassals grew,
The crown from off my forehead drops,
And I again am serf with you.

1855.

STUDIES FOR PICTURES

I

AT HOME

The rain is sobbing on the wold;
The house is dark, the hearth is cold;
And, stretching drear and ashy gray
Beyond the cedars, lies the bay.

The winds are moaning, as they pass
Through tangled knots of autumn grass, —
A weary, dreary sound of woe,
As if all joy were dead below.

I sit alone, I wait in vain
Some voice to lull this nameless pain;
But from my neighbor's cottage near
Come sounds of happy household cheer.

My neighbor at his window stands,
His youngest baby in his hands;
The others seek his tender kiss,
And one sweet woman crowns his bliss.

I look upon the rainy wild :
I have no wife, I have no child :
There is no fire upon my hearth,
And none to love me on the earth.

II

THE NEIGHBOR

How cool and wet the lowlands lie
Beneath the cloaked and wooded sky!
How softly beats the welcome rain
Against the plashy window-pane!

There is no sail upon the bay :
We cannot go abroad to-day,
But, darlings, come and take my hand,
And hear a tale of Fairy-land.

The baby's little head shall rest
In quiet on his father's breast,
And mother, if he chance to stir,
Shall sing him songs once sung to her.

Ah, little ones, ye do not fret
Because the garden grass is wet ;
Ye love the rains, whene'er they come,
That all day keep your father home.

No fish to-day the net shall yield ;
The happy oxen graze afield ;
The thirsty corn will drink its fill,
And louder sing the woodland rill.

Then, darlings, nestle round the hearth ;
Ye are the sunshine of the earth :
Your tender eyes so fondly shine,
They bring a welcome rain to mine.

III

UNDER THE STARS

How the hot revel's fever dies,
Beneath the stillness of the skies!
How suddenly the whirl and glare
Shoot far away, and this cold air
Its icy beverage brings, to chase
The burning wine-flush from my face!
The window's gleam still faintly falls,
And music sounds at intervals,
Jarring the pulses of the night
With whispers of profane delight ;
But on the midnight's awful strand,
Like some wrecked swimmer flung to land,
I lie, and hear those breakers roar :
And smile — they cannot harm me more!

Keep, keep your lamps ; they do not mar
The silver of a single star.
The painted roses you display
Drop from your cheeks, and fade away ;
The snowy warmth you bid me see
Is hollowness and mockery ;
The words that make your sin so fair
Grow silent in this vestal air ;
The loosened madness of your hair,
That wrapped me in its snaky coils,
No more shall mesh me in your toils ;
Your very kisses on my brow
Burn like the lips of devils now.
O sacred night! O virgin calm!
Teach me the immemorial psalm
Of your eternal watch sublime
Above the grovelling lusts of Time!
Within, the orgie shouts and reels ;
Without, the planets' golden wheels
Spin, circling through the utmost space ;
Within, each flushed and reckless face
Is masked to cheat a haunting care ;
Without, the silence and the prayer.
Within, the beast of flesh controls ;
Without, the God that speaks in souls!

IV

IN THE MORNING

The lamps were thick ; the air was hot ;
The heavy curtains hushed the room ;
The sultry midnight seemed to blot
All life but ours in vacant gloom.

You spoke : my blood in every vein
Throbbed, as by sudden fever stirred,
And some strange whirling in my brain
Subdued my judgment, as I heard.

Ah, yes! when men are dead asleep,
When all the tongues of day are still,
The heart must sometimes fail to keep
Its natural poise 'twixt good and ill.

You knew too well its blind desires,
Its savage instincts, scarce confessed;
I could not see you touch the wires,
But felt your lightning in my breast.

For you, Life's web displayed its flaws,
The wrong which Time transforms to right:
The iron mesh of social laws
Was but a cobweb in your sight.

You showed that tempting freedom, where
The passions bear their perfect fruit,
The cheats of conscience cannot scare,
And Self is monarch absolute.

And something in me seemed to rise,
And trample old obedience down:
The serf sprang up, with furious eyes,
And clutched at the imperial crown.

That fierce rebellion overbore
The arbiter that watched within,
Till Sin so changed an aspect wore,
It was no longer that of Sin.

You gloried in the fevered flush
That spread, defiant, o'er my face,
Nor thought how soon this morning's blush
Would chronicle the night's disgrace.

I wash my eyes; I bathe my brow;
I see the sun on hill and plain:
The old allegiance claims me now,
The old content returns again.

Ah, seek to stop the sober glow
And healthy airs that come with day,
For when the cocks at dawning crow
Your evil spirits flee away.

1855.

SUNKEN TREASURES

When the uneasy waves of life subside,
And the soothed ocean sleeps in glassy rest,
I see, submerged beyond or storm or tide,
The treasures gathered in its greedy breast.

There still they shine, through the translucent Past,
Far down on that forever quiet floor;
No fierce upheaval of the deep shall cast
Them back, — no wave shall wash them to the shore.

I see them gleaming, beautiful as when
Erewhile they floated, convoys of my fate;
The barks of lovely women, noble men,
Full-sailed with hope, and stored with Love's own freight.

The sunken ventures of my heart as well,
Look up to me, as perfect as at dawn;
My golden palace heaves beneath the swell
To meet my touch, and is again withdrawn.

There sleep the early triumphs, cheaply won,
That led Ambition to his utmost verge,
And still his visions, like a drowning sun,
Send up receding splendors through the surge.

There wait the recognitions, the quick ties,
Whence the heart knows its kin, wherever cast;
And there the partings, when the wistful eyes
Caress each other as they look their last.

There lie the summer eves, delicious eves,
The soft green valleys drenched with light divine,
The lisping murmurs of the chestnut leaves,
The hand that lay, the eyes that looked in mine.

There lives the hour of fear and rapture yet,
The perilled climax of the passionate years;
There still the rains of wan December wet
A naked mound, — I cannot see for tears!

There are they all: they do not fade or waste,
Lapped in the arms of the embalming brine;
More fair than when their beings mine embraced, —
Of nobler aspect, beauty more divine.

I see them all, but stretch my hands in vain;
No deep-sea plummet reaches where they rest;
No cunning diver shall descend the main,
And bring a single jewel from its breast.

1855.

THE VOYAGERS

No longer spread the sail!
No longer strain the oar!
For never yet has blown the gale
Will bring us nearer shore.

The swaying keel slides on,
The helm obeys the hand;
Fast we have sailed from dawn to dawn,
Yet never reach the land.

Each morn we see its peaks,
Made beautiful with snow;
Each eve its vales and winding creeks,
That sleep in mist below.

At noon we mark the gleam
Of temples tall and fair;
At midnight watch its bonfires stream
In the auroral air.

And still the keel is swift,
And still the wind is free,
And still as far its mountains lift
Beyond the enchanted sea.

Yet vain is all return,
Though false the goal before;
The gale is ever dead astern,
The current sets to shore.

O shipmates, leave the ropes, —
And what though no one steers,
We sail no faster for our hopes,
No slower for our fears.

Howe'er the bark is blown,
Lie down and sleep awhile:
What profits toil, when chance alone
Can bring us to the isle?

1855.

SONG

Now the days are brief and drear:
Naked lies the new-born Year
In his cradle of the snow,
And the winds unbridled blow,
And the skies hang dark and low, —
For the Summers come and go.

Leave the clashing cymbals mute!
Pipe no more the happy flute!
Sing no more that dancing rhyme
Of the rose's harvest-time; —
Sing a requiem, sad and low:
For the Summers come and go.

Where is Youth? He strayed away
Through the meadow-flowers of May.
Where is Love? The leaves that fell
From his trysting-bower, can tell.
Wisdom stays, sedate and slow,
And the Summers come and go.

Yet a few more years to run,
Wheeling round in gloom and sun:
Other raptures, other woes, —
Toil alternate with Repose:
Then to sleep where daisies grow,
While the Summers come and go.

1858.

THE MYSTERY

Thou art not dead; thou art not gone to dust;
No line of all thy loveliness shall fall
To formless ruin, smote by Time, and thrust
Into the solemn gulf that covers all.

Thou canst not wholly perish, though the sod
Sink with its violets closer to thy breast;
Though by the feet of generations trod,
The headstone crumbles from thy place of rest.

The marvel of thy beauty cannot die;
The sweetness of thy presence shall not fade;
Earth gave not all the glory of thine eye, —
Death may not keep what Death has never made.

It was not thine, that forehead strange and cold,
Nor those dumb lips, they hid beneath the snow;
Thy heart would throb beneath that passive fold,
Thy hands for me that stony clasp forego.

But thou hadst gone, — gone from the dreary land,
Gone from the storms let loose on every hill,
Lured by the sweet persuasion of a hand
Which leads thee somewhere in the distance still.

Where'er thou art, I know thou wearest yet
The same bewildering beauty, sanctified
By calmer joy, and touched with soft regret
For him who seeks, but cannot reach thy side.

I keep for thee the living love of old,
And seek thy place in Nature, as a child
Whose hand is parted from his playmate's hold,
Wanders and cries along a lonesome wild.

When, in the watches of my heart, I hear
The messages of purer life, and know
The footsteps of thy spirit lingering near,
The darkness hides the way that I should go.

Canst thou not bid the empty realms restore
That form, the symbol of thy heavenly part?
Or on the fields of barren silence pour
That voice, the perfect music of thy heart?

Oh once, once bending to these widowed lips,
Take back the tender warmth of life from me,
Or let thy kisses cloud with swift eclipse
The light of mine, and give me death with thee?

1851.

A PICTURE

Sometimes, in sleeping dreams of night,
Or waking dreams of day,
The selfsame picture seeks my sight
And will not fade away.

I see a valley, cold and still,
Beneath a leaden sky:
The woods are leafless on the hill,
The fields deserted lie.

The gray November eve benumbs
The damp and cheerless air;
A wailing from the forest comes,
As of the world's despair.

But on the verge of night and storm,
Far down the valley's line,
I see the lustre, red and warm,
Of cottage windows shine.

And men are housed, and in their place
In snug and happy rest,
Save one, who walks with weary pace
The highway's frozen breast.

His limbs, that tremble with the cold,
Shrink from the coming storm;
But underneath his mantle's fold
His heart beats quick and warm.

He hears the laugh of those who sit
In Home's contented air;
He sees the busy shadows flit
Across the window's glare.

His heart is full of love unspent,
His eyes are wet and dim;
For in those circles of content
There is no room for him.

He clasps his hands and looks above,
He makes the bitter cry:
"All, all are happy in their love, —
All are beloved but I!"

Across no threshold streams the light,
Expectant, o'er his track;
No door is opened on the night,
To bid him welcome back.

There is no other man abroad
In all the wintry vale,
And lower upon his lonely road
The darkness and the gale.

I see him through the doleful shades
Press onward, sad and slow,
Till from my dream the picture fades,
And from my heart the woe.

1854.

IN THE MEADOWS

I LIE in the summer meadows,
In the meadows all alone,
With the infinite sky above me,
And the sun on his midday throne.

The smell of the flowering grasses
Is sweeter than any rose,
And a million happy insects
Sing in the warm repose.

The mother lark that is brooding
Feels the sun on her wings,
And the deeps of the noonday glitter
With swarms of fairy things.

From the billowy green beneath me
To the fathomless blue above,
The creatures of God are happy
In the warmth of their summer love.

The infinite bliss of Nature
I feel in every vein;
The light and the life of Summer
Blossom in heart and brain.

But darker than any shadow
By thunder-clouds unfurled,
The awful truth arises,
That Death is in the world!

And the sky may beam as ever,
And never a cloud be curled;
And the airs be living odors,
But Death is in the world!

Out of the deeps of sunshine
The invisible bolt is hurled:
There 's life in the summer meadows,
But Death is in the world!

1854.

"DOWN IN THE DELL I WANDERED"

DOWN in the dell I wandered,
The loneliest of our dells,
Where grow the lowland lilies,
Dropping their foam-white bells,
And the brook among the grasses
Toys with its sand and shells.

Fair were the meads and thickets,
And sumptuous grew the trees,
And the folding hills of harvest
Were thrilled with the rippling breeze,
But I heard beyond the valley,
The hum of the plunging seas.

The birds and the vernal grasses,
They wooed me sweetly and long,
But the magic of ocean called me,
Murmuring free and strong,
And the voice of the peaceful valley
Mixed with the billow's song!

"Stay in the wood's embraces!
Stay in the dell's repose!"

"Float on the limitless azure,
Flecked with its foamy snows!"
These were the flattering voices,
Mingled in musical close.

Bliss in the soft, green shelter,
Fame on the boundless blue;
Free with the winds of the ages,
Nestled in shade and dew:
Which shall I yield forever?
Which shall I clasp and woo?

SONG

They call thee false as thou art fair,
They call thee fair and free, —
A creature pliant as the air
And changeful as the sea:
But I, who gaze with other eyes, —
Who stand and watch afar, —
Behold thee pure as yonder skies
And steadfast as a star!

Thine is a rarer nature, born
To rule the common crowd,
And thou dost lightly laugh to scorn
The hearts before thee bowed.
Thou dreamest of a different love
Than comes to such as these;
That soars as high as heaven above
Their shallow sympathies.

A star that shines with flickering spark
Thou dost not wane away,
But shed'st adown the purple dark
The fulness of thy ray:
A rose, whose odors freely part
At every zephyr's will,
Thou keep'st within thy folded heart
Its virgin sweetness still!

THE PHANTOM

Again I sit within the mansion,
In the old, familiar seat;
And shade and sunshine chase each other
O'er the carpet at my feet.

But the sweet-brier's arms have wrestled upwards
In the summers that are past,
And the willow trails its branches lower
Than when I saw them last.

They strive to shut the sunshine wholly
From out the haunted room;
To fill the house, that once was joyful,
With silence and with gloom.

And many kind, remembered faces
Within the doorway come, —
Voices, that wake the sweeter music
Of one that now is dumb.

They sing, in tones as glad as ever,
The songs she loved to hear;
They braid the rose in summer garlands,
Whose flowers to her were dear.

And still, her footsteps in the passage,
Her blushes at the door,
Her timid words of maiden welcome,
Come back to me once more.

And, all forgetful of my sorrow,
Unmindful of my pain,
I think she has but newly left me,
And soon will come again.

She stays without, perchance, a moment
To dress her dark-brown hair;
I hear the rustle of her garments —
Her light step on the stair!

O fluttering heart! control thy tumult,
Lest eyes profane should see
My cheeks betray the rush of rapture
Her coming brings to me!

She tarries long: but lo! a whisper
Beyond the open door,
And, gliding through the quiet sunshine,
A shadow on the floor!

Ah! 'tis the whispering pine that calls me,
The vine, whose shadow strays;
And my patient heart must still await her,
Nor chide her long delays.

But my heart grows sick with weary waiting,
As many a time before:
Her foot is ever at the threshold,
Yet never passes o'er.

1854.

THE POET'S JOURNAL

PREFACE

THE RETURN OF THE GODDESS

Not as in youth, with steps outspeeding morn,
And cheeks all bright, from rapture of the way,
But in strange mood, half cheerful, half forlorn,
She comes to me to-day.

Does she forget the trysts we used to keep,
When dead leaves rustled on autumnal ground,
Or the lone garret, whence she banished sleep
With threats of silver sound?

Does she forget how shone the happy eyes
When they beheld her, — how the eager tongue
Plied its swift oar through wave-like harmonies,
To reach her where she sung?

How at her sacred feet I cast me down?
How she upraised me to her bosom fair,
And from her garland shred the first light crown
That ever pressed my hair?

Though dust is on the leaves, her breath will bring
Their freshness back: why lingers she so long?
The pulseless air is waiting for her wing,
Dumb with unuttered song.

If tender doubt delay her on the road,
Oh let her haste to find the doubt belied!
If shame for love unworthily bestowed,
That shame shall melt in pride.

If she but smile, the crystal calm shall break
In music, sweeter than it ever gave,
As when a breeze breathes o'er some sleeping lake,
And laughs in every wave.

The ripples of awakened song shall die
Kissing her feet, and woo her not in vain,
Until, as once, upon her breast I lie —
Pardoned, and loved again!

1859.

INSCRIPTION

TO THE MISTRESS OF CEDARCROFT

I

The evening shadows lengthen on the lawn:
  Westward, our immemorial chestnuts stand,
A mount of shade; but o'er the cedars drawn,
  Between the hedge-row trees, in many a band
Of brightening gold, the sunshine lingers on,
  And soon will touch our oaks with parting hand:
And down the distant valley all is still,
And flushed with purple smiles the beckoning hill.

II

Come, leave the flowery terrace, leave the beds
  Where Southern children wake to Northern air:
Let yon mimosas droop their tufted heads,
  These myrtle-trees their nuptial beauty wear,
And while the dying day reluctant treads
  From tree-top unto tree-top, with me share
The scene's idyllic peace, the evening's close,
The balm of twilight, and the land's repose.

III

Come, for my task is done: the task that drew
  My footsteps from the chambers of the Day, —
That held me back, Beloved, even from you,
  That are my daylight: for the Poet's way
Turns into many a lonely avenue
  Where none may follow. He must sing his lay
First to himself, then to the One most dear;
Last, to the world. Come to my side, and hear!

IV

The poems ripened in a heart at rest,
  A life that first through you is free and strong,
Take them and warm them in your partial breast,
  Before they try the common air of song!
Fame won at home is of all fame the best:
  Crown me your poet, and the critic's wrong
Shall harmless strike where you in love have smiled,
Wife of my heart, and mother of my child!

1860.

THE POET'S JOURNAL

FIRST EVENING

The day had come, the day of many years.
My bud of hope, thorned round with guarding fears,
And sealed with frosts of oft-renewed delay,
Burst into sudden bloom — it was the day!
"Ernest will come!" the early sunbeams cried;
"Will come!" was breathed through all the woodlands wide;
"Will come, will come!" said cloud, and brook, and bird;
And when the hollow roll of wheels was heard
Across the bridge, it thundered, "He is near!"
And then my heart made answer, "He is here!"

Ernest was here, and now the day had gone
Like other days, yet wild and swift and sweet, —
And yet prolonged, as if with whirling feet
One troop of duplicated Hours sped on
And one trod out the moments lingeringly:
So distant seemed the lonely dawn from me.
But all was well. He paced the new-mown lawn,
With Edith at his side, and, while my firs
Stood bronzed with sunset, happy glances cast
On the familiar landmarks of the Past.
I heard a gentle laugh: the laugh was hers.
"Confess it," she exclaimed, "I recognize,
No less than you, the features of the place,
So often have I seen it with the eyes
Your memory gave me: yea, your very face,
With every movement of the theme, betrayed
That here the sunshine lay, and there the shade."
"A proof!" cried Ernest. "Let me be your guide,"
She said, "and speak not: Philip shall decide."
To them I went, at beckon of her hand.
A moment she the mellow landscape scanned
In seeming doubt, but only to prolong
A witching aspect of uncertainty,
And the soft smile in Ernest's watching eye:
"Yonder," she said, "(I see I am not wrong,
By Philip's face,) you built your hermit seat
Against the rock, among the scented fern,
Where summer lizards played about your feet;
And here, beside us, is the tottering urn
You cracked in fixing firmly on its base;
And here — yes, yes! — this is the very place —
I know the wild vine and the sassafras —
Where you and Philip, lying in the grass,

Disowned the world, renounced the race of men,
And you all love, except your own for him,
Until, through that, all love came back again."
Here Edith paused; but Ernest's eyes were dim.
He kissed her, gave a loving hand to me,
And spoke: "Ah, Philip, Philip, those were days
We *dare* remember now, when only blaze
Far-off, the storm's black edges brokenly.
Who thinks, at night, that morn will ever be?
Who knows, far out upon the central sea,
That anywhere is land? And yet, a shore
Has set behind us, and will rise before:
A past foretells a future." "Blessed be
That Past!" I answered, "on whose bosom lay
Peace, like a new-born child: and now, I see,
The child is man, begetting day by day
Some fresher joy, some other bliss, to make
Your life the fairer for his mother's sake."

Deeper beneath the oaks the shadows grew:
The twilight glimmer from their tops withdrew,
And purple gloomed the distant hills, and sweet
The sudden breath of evening rose, with balm
Of grassy meadows: in the upper calm
The pulses of the stars began to beat:
The fire-flies twinkled: through the lindens went
A rustle, as of happy leaves composed
To airy sleep, of drowsy petals closed,
And the dark land lay silent and content.
We, too, were silent. Ernest walked, I knew,
With me, beneath the stars of other eves:
He heard, with me, the tongues of perished leaves:
Departed suns their trails of splendor drew
Across departed summers: whispers came
From voices, long ago resolved again
Into the primal Silence, and we twain,
Ghosts of our present selves, yet still the same,
As in a spectral mirror wandered there.
Its pain outlived, the Past was only fair.
Ten years had passed since I had touched his hand,
And felt upon my lips the brother-kiss
That shames not manhood, — years of quiet bliss
To me, fast-rooted on paternal land,
Mated, yet childless. He had journeyed far
Beyond the borders of my life, and whirled
Unresting round the vortex of the world,
The reckless child of some eccentric star,
Careless of fate, yet with a central strength
I knew would hold his life in equipoise,
And bent his wandering energies, at length,
To the smooth orbit of serener joys.
Few were the winds that wafted to my nest
A leaf from him: I learned that he was blest, —
The late fulfilment of my prophecy, —
And then I felt that he must come to me,
The old, unswerving sympathy to claim;

And set my house in order for a guest
Long ere the message of his coming came.

In gentle terraces my garden fell
Down to the rolling lawn. On one side rose,
Flanking the layers of bloom, a bolder swell
With laurels clad, and every shrub that grows
Upon our native hills, a bosky mound,
Whence the commingling valleys might be seen
Bluer and lovelier through the gaps of green.
The rustic arbor which the summit crowned
Was woven of shining smilax, trumpet-vine,
Clematis, and the wild white eglantine,
Whose tropical luxuriance overhung
The interspaces of the posts, and made
For each sweet picture frames of bloom and shade.
It was my favorite haunt when I was young,
To read my poets, watch my sunset fade
Behind my father's hills, and, when the moon
Shed warmer silver through the nights of June,
Dream, as 't were new, the universal dream.
This arbor, too, was Ernest's hermitage:
Here he had read to me his tear-stained page
Of sorrow, here renewed the pang supreme
Which burned his youth to ashes: here would try
To lay his burden in the hands of Song,
And make the Poet bear the Lover's wrong,
But still his heart impatiently would cry:
"In vain, in vain! You cannot teach to flow
In measured lines so measureless a woe.
First learn to slay this wild beast of despair,
Then from his harmless jaws your honey tear!"

Hither we came. Beloved hands had graced
The table with a flask of mellow juice,
Thereto the gentle herb that poets use
When Fancy droops, and in the corner placed
A lamp, that glimmered through its misty sphere
Like moonlit marble, on a pedestal
Of knotted roots, against the leafy wall.
The air was dry, the night was calm and clear,
And in the dying clover crickets chirped.
The Past, I felt, the Past alone usurped
Our thoughts, — the hour of confidence had come,
Of sweet confession, tender interchange,
Which drew our hearts together, yet with strange
Half-dread repelled them. Seeing Ernest dumb
With memories of the spot, as if to me
Belonged the right his secrets to evoke,
And Edith's eyes on mine, consentingly,
Conscious of all I wished to know, I spoke:
"Dear Friend, one volume of your life I read
Beneath these vines: you placed it in my hand
And made it mine, — but how the tale has sped
Since then, I know not, or can understand
From this fair ending only. Let me see

The intervening chapters, dark and bright,
In order, as you lived them. Give to-night
Unto the Past, dear Ernest, and to me!"
Thus I, with doubt and loving hesitance,
Lest I should touch a nerve he fain would hide;
But he, with calm and reassuring glance,
In which no troubled shadow lay, replied:
"That mingled light and darkness are no more
In this new life, than are the sun and shade
Of painted landscapes: distant lies the shore
Where last we parted, Philip: how I made
The journey, what adventures on the road,
What haps I met, what struggles, what success
Of fame, or gold, or place, concerns you less,
Dear friend, than how I lost that sorest load
I started with, and came to dwell at last
In the House Beautiful. There but remains
A fragment here and there, — wild, broken strains
And scattered voices speaking from the Past."
"Let me those broken voices hear," I said,
"And I shall know the rest." "Well — be it so.
You, who would write '*Resurgam*' o'er my dead,
The resurrection of my heart shall know."

Then Edith rose, and up the terraces
Went swiftly to the house; but soon we spied
Her white dress gleam, returning through the trees,
And, softly flushed, she came to Ernest's side,
A volume in her hand. But he delayed
Awhile his task, revolving leaf by leaf
With tender interest, now that ancient grief
No more had power to make his heart afraid;
For pain, that only lives in memory,
Like battle-scars, it is no pain to show.
"Here, Philip, are the secrets you would know,"
He said: "Howe'er obscure the utterance be,
The lamp you lighted in the olden time
Will show my heart's-blood beating through the rhyme:
A poet's journal, writ in fire and tears
At first, blind protestations, blinder rage,
(For you and Edith only, many a page!)
Then slow deliverance, with the gaps of years
Between, and final struggles into life,
Which the heart shrank from, as 't were death instead."
Then, with a loving glance towards his wife,
Which she as fondly answered, thus he read: —

THE TORSO

I

In clay the statue stood complete,
As beautiful a form, and fair,
As ever walked a Roman street
Or breathed the blue Athenian air:
The perfect limbs, divinely bare,
Their old, heroic freedom kept,
And in the features, fine and rare,
A calm, immortal sweetness slept.

II

O'er common men it towered, a god,
And smote their meaner life with shame,

For while its feet the highway trod,
Its lifted brow was crowned with flame
And purified from touch of blame:
Yet wholly human was the face,
And over them who saw it came
The knowledge of their own disgrace.

III

It stood, regardless of the crowd,
And simply showed what men might be:
Its solemn beauty disavowed
The curse of lost humanity.
Erect and proud, and pure and free,
It overlooked each loathsome law
Whereunto others bend the knee,
And only what was noble saw.

IV

The patience and the hope of years
Their final hour of triumph caught;
The clay was tempered with my tears,
The forces of my spirit wrought
With hands of fire to shape my thought,
That when, complete, the statue stood,
To marble resurrection brought,
The Master might pronounce it good.

V

But in the night an enemy,
Who could not bear the wreath should grace
My ready forehead, stole the key
And hurled my statue from its base;
And now its fragments strew the place
Where I had dreamed its shrine might be:
The stains of common earth deface
Its beauty and its majesty.

VI

The torso prone before me lies;
The cloven brow is knit with pain:
Mute lips, and blank, reproachful eyes
Unto my hands appeal in vain.
My hands shall never work again:
My hope is dead, my strength is spent:
This fatal wreck shall now remain
The ruined sculptor's monument.

1860.

ON THE HEADLAND

I sit on the lonely headland,
Where the sea-gulls come and go:
The sky is gray above me,
And the sea is gray below.

There is no fisherman's pinnace
Homeward or outward bound;
I see no living creature
In the world's deserted round.

I pine for something human,
Man, woman, young or old, —
Something to meet and welcome,
Something to clasp and hold.

I have a mouth for kisses,
But there 's no one to give and take;
I have a heart in my bosom
Beating for nobody's sake.

O warmth of love that is wasted!
Is there none to stretch a hand?
No other heart that hungers
In all the living land?

I could fondle the fisherman's baby,
And rock it into rest;
I could take the sunburnt sailor,
Like a brother, to my breast.

I could clasp the hand of any
Outcast of land or sea,
If the guilty palm but answered
The tenderness in me!

The sea might rise and drown me, —
Cliffs fall and crush my head, —
Were there one to love me, living,
Or weep to see me dead!

1855.

MARAH

The waters of my life were sweet,
Before that bolt of sorrow fell;
But now, though fainting with the heat,
I dare not drink the bitter well.

My God! shall Sin across the heart
Sweep like a wind that leaves no trace,
But Grief inflict a rankling smart
No after blessing can efface?

I see the tired mechanic take
His evening rest beside his door,
And gentlier, for their father's sake,
His children tread the happy floor:

The kitchen teems with cheering smells,
With clash of cups and clink of knives,
And all the household picture tells
Of humble yet contented lives.

Then in my heart the serpents hiss:
What right have these, who scarcely know
The perfect sweetness of their bliss,
To flaunt it thus before my woe?

Like bread, Love's portion they divide,
Like water drink his precious wine,
When the least crumb they cast aside
Were manna for these lips of mine.

I see the friend of other days
Lead home his flushed and silent bride!
His eyes are suns of tender praise,
Her eyes are stars of tender pride.

Go, hide your shameless happiness,
The demon cries, within my breast;
Think not that I the bond can bless,
Which seeing, I am twice unblest.

The husband of a year proclaims
His recent honor, shows the boy,
And calls the babe a thousand names,
And dandles it in awkward joy:

And then — I see the wife's pale cheek,
Her eyes of pure, celestial ray —
The curse is choked: I cannot speak,
But, weeping, turn my head away!

1860.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER

Last night the Tempter came to me, and said:
"Why sorrow any longer for the dead?
The wrong is done: thy tears and groans are naught:
Forget the Past, — thy pain but lives in thought.

Night after night, I hear thy cries implore
An answer: she will answer thee no more.
Give up thine idle prayer that Death may come
And thou mayest somewhere find her: Death is dumb
To those that seek him. Live: for youth is thine.
Let not thy rich blood, like neglected wine,
Grow thin and stale, but rouse thyself, at last,
And take a man's revenge upon the Past.
What have thy virtues brought thee? Let them go,
And with them lose the burden of thy woe,
Their only payment for thy service hard:
They but exact, thou see'st, and not reward.
Thy life is cheated, thou art cast aside
In dust, the worn-out vessel of their pride.
Come, take thy pleasure: others do the same,
And love is theirs, and fortune, name, and fame!
Let not the name of Vice thine ear affright:
Vice is no darkness, but a different light,
Which thou dost need, to see thy path aright:
Or if some pang in this experience lie,
Through counter-pain thy present pain will die.
Bethink thee of the lost, the barren years,
Of harsh privations, unavailing tears,
The steady ache of strong desires restrained,
And what thou hast deserved, and what obtained:
Then go, thou fool! and, if thou canst, rejoice
To make such base ingratitude thy choice,
While each indulgence which thy brethren taste
But mocks thy palate, as it runs to waste!"

So spake the Tempter, as he held outspread
Alluring pictures round my prostrate head.
'Twixt sleep and waking, in my helpless ear
His honeyed voice rang musical and clear;
And half persuaded, shaken half with fear,
I heard him, till the Morn began to shine,
And found her brow less dewy-wet than mine.

1860.

EXORCISM

O TONGUES of the Past, be still!
Are the days not over and gone?
The joys have perished that were so sweet,
But the sorrow still lives on.

I have sealed the graves of my hopes;
I have carried the pall of love:
Let the pains and pangs be buried as deep,
And the grass be as green above!

But the ghosts of the dead arise:
They come when the board is spread;
They poison the wine of the banquet cups
With the mould their lips have shed.

The pulse of the bacchant blood
May throb in the ivy wreath,
But the berries are plucked from the nightshade bough
That grows in the gardens of Death.

I sleep with joy at my heart,
Warm as a new-made bride;
But a vampire comes to suck her blood,
And I wake with a corpse at my side.

O ghosts, I have given to you
The bliss of the faded years;
The sweat of my brow, the blood of my heart,
And manhood's terrible tears!

Take them, and be content:
I have nothing more to give:
My soul is chilled in the house of Death,
And 't is time that I should live.

Take them, and let me be:
Lie still in the churchyard mould,
Nor chase from my heart each new delight
With the phantom of the old!

1855.

SQUANDERED LIVES

THE fisherman wades in the surges;
The sailor sails over the sea;
The soldier steps bravely to battle;
The woodman lays axe to the tree.

They are each of the breed of the heroes,
The manhood attempered in strife:
Strong hands, that go lightly to labor,
True hearts, that take comfort in life.

In each is the seed to replenish
The world with the vigor it needs, —
The centre of honest affections,
The impulse to generous deeds.

But the shark drinks the blood of the fisher;
The sailor is dropped in the sea;
The soldier lies cold by his cannon;
The woodman is crushed by his tree.

Each prodigal life that is wasted
In manly achievement unseen,
But lengthens the days of the coward,
And strengthens the crafty and mean.

The blood of the noblest is lavished
That the selfish a profit may find;
But God sees the lives that are squandered,
And we to His wisdom are blind.

1855.

A SYMBOL

I

Heavy, and hot, and gray,
Day following unto day,
A felon gang, their blind life drag away, —

Blind, vacant, dumb, as Time,
Lapsed from his wonted prime,
Begot them basely in incestuous crime:

So little life there seems
About the woods and streams, —
Only a sleep, perplexed with nightmare-dreams.

The burden of a sigh
Stifles the weary sky,
Where smouldering clouds in ashen masses lie:

The forests fain would groan,
But, silenced into stone,
Crouch, in the dull blue vapors round them thrown.

O light, more drear than gloom!
Than death more dead such bloom:
Yet life — yet life — shall burst this gathering doom!

II

Behold! a swift and silent fire
Yon dull cloud pierces, in the west,
And blackening, as with growing ire,
He lifts his forehead from his breast.

He mutters to the ashy host
That all around him sleeping lie, —
Sole chieftain on the airy coast,
To fight the battles of the sky.

He slowly lifts his weary strength,
His shadow rises on the day,
And distant forests feel at length
A wind from landscapes far away.

III

How shall the cloud unload its thunder?
How shall its flashes fire the air?
Hills and valleys are dumb with wonder:
Lakes look up with a leaden stare.

Hark! the lungs of the striding giant
Bellow an angry answer back!
Hurling the hair from his brows defiant,
Crushing the laggards along his track.

Now his step, like a battling Titan's,
Scales in flame the hills of the sky;
Struck by his breath, the forest whitens;
Fluttering waters feel him nigh!

Stroke on stroke of his thunder-hammer —
Sheets of flame from his anvil hurled —
Heaven's doors are burst in the clamor:
He alone possesses the world!

IV

Drowned woods, shudder no more:
Vexed lakes, smile as before:
Hills that vanished, appear again:
Rise for harvest, prostrate grain!

Shake thy jewels, twinkling grass:
Blossoms, tint the winds that pass:
Sun, behold a world restored!
World, again thy sun is lord!

Thunder-spasms the waking be
Into Life from Apathy:
Life, not Death, is in the gale, —
Let the coming Doom prevail!

1859.

Thus far he read: at first with even tone,
Still chanting in the old, familiar key, —
That golden note, whose grand monotony
Is musical in poets' mouths alone, —
But broken, as he read, became the chime.
To speak, once more, in Grief's forgotten tongue,
And feel the hot reflex of passion flung
Back on the heart by every pulse of rhyme

Wherein it lives and burns, a soul might shake
More calm than his. With many a tender break
Of voice, a dimness of the haughty eye,
And pause of wandering memory, he read;
While I, with folded arms and downcast head,
In silence heard each blind, bewildered cry.
Thus far had Ernest read: but, closing now
The book, and lifting up a calmer brow,
"Forgive me, patient God, for this!" he said:
"And you forgive, dear friend, and dearest wife,
If I have marred an hour of this sweet life
With noises from the valley of the Dead.
Long, long ago, the Hand whereat I railed
In blindness gave me courage to subdue
This wild revolt: I see wherein I failed:
My heart was false, when most I thought it true,
My sorrow selfish, when I thought it pure.
For those we lose, if still their love endure
Translation to that other land, where Love
Breathes the immortal wisdom, ask in heaven
No greater sacrifice than we had given
On earth, our love's integrity to prove.
If we are blest to know the other blest,
Then treason lies in sorrow. Vainly said!
Alone each heart must cover up its dead;
Alone, through bitter toil, achieve its rest:
Which I have found — but still these records keep,
Lest I, condemning others, should forget
My own rebellion. From these tares I reap,
In evil days, a fruitful harvest yet.

"But 't is enough, to-night. Nay, Philip, here
A chapter closes. See! the moon is near:
Your laurels glitter: come, my darling, sing
The hymn I wrote on such a night as this!"
Then Edith, stooping first to take his kiss,
Drew from its niche of woodbine her guitar,
With chords prelusive tuned a slackened string,
And sang, clear-voiced, as some melodious star
Were dropping silver sweetness from afar:

God, to whom we look up blindly,
Look Thou down upon us kindly:
We have sinned, but not designedly.

If our faith in Thee was shaken,
Pardon Thou our hearts mistaken,
Our obedience reawaken.

We are sinful, Thou art holy:
Thou art mighty, we are lowly:
Let us reach Thee, climbing slowly.

Our ingratitude confessing,
On Thy mercy still transgressing,
Thou dost punish us with blessing!

SECOND EVENING

It was the evening of the second day,
Which swifter, sweeter than the first had fled:
My heart's delicious tumult passed away
And left a sober happiness instead.
For Ernest's voice was ever in mine ear,
His presence mingled as of old with mine,
But stronger, manlier, brighter, more divine
Its effluence now: within his starry sphere
Of love new-risen my nature too was drawn,
And warmed with rosy flushes of the dawn.

All day we drove about the lovely vales,
Under the hill-side farms, through summer woods,
The land of mingled homes and solitudes
That Ernest loved. We told the dear old tales
Of childhood, music new to Edith's ear,
Sang olden songs, lived old adventures o'er,
And, when the hours brought need of other cheer,
Spread on the ferny rocks a tempting store
Of country dainties. 'T was our favorite dell,
Cut by the trout-stream through a wooded ridge:
Above, the highway on a mossy bridge
Strode o'er it, and below, the water fell
Through hornblende bowlders, where the dircus flung
His pliant rods, the berried spice-wood grew,
And tulip-trees and smooth magnolias hung
A million leaves between us and the blue.
The silver water-dust in puffs arose
And turned to dust of jewels in the sun,
And like a cañon, in its close begun
Afresh, the stream's perpetual lullaby
Sang down the dell, and deepened its repose.
Here, till the western hours had left the sky,
We sat: then homeward loitered through the dusk
Of chestnut woods, along the meadow-side,
And lost in lanes that breathed ambrosial musk
Of wild-grape blossoms: and the twilight died.

Long after every star came out, we paced
The terrace, still discoursing on the themes
The day had started, intermixed with dreams
Born of the summer night. Then, golden-faced,
Behind her daybreak of auroral gleams,
The moon arose: the bosom of the lawn
Whitened beneath her silent snow of light,
Save where the trees made isles of mystic night,
Dark blots against the rising splendor drawn,
And where the eastern wall of woodland towered,
Blue darkness, filled with undistinguished shapes:
But elsewhere, over all the landscape showered —
A silver drizzle on the distant capes
Of hills — the glory of the moon. We sought,
Drawn thither by the same unspoken thought,

The mound, where now the leaves of laurel clashed
Their dagger-points of light, around the bower,
And through the nets of leaf and elfin flower,
Cold fire, the sprinkled drops of moonshine flashed.

Erelong in Ernest's hand the volume lay,
(I did not need a second time to ask,)
And he resumed the intermitted task.
"This night, dear Philip, is the Poet's day,"
He said: "the world is one confessional:
Our sacred memories as freely fall
As leaves from o'er-ripe blossoms: we betray
Ourselves to Nature, who the tale can win
We shrink from uttering in the daylight's din.
So, Friend, come back with me a little way
Along the years, and in these records find
The sole inscriptions they have left behind."

ATONEMENT

If thou hadst died at midnight,
With a lamp beside thy bed;
The beauty of sleep exchanging
For the beauty of the dead:

When the bird of heaven had called thee,
And the time had come to go,
And the northern lights were dancing
On the dim December snow, —

If thou hadst died at midnight,
I had ceased to bid thee stay,
Hearing the feet of the Father
Leading His child away.

I had knelt, in the awful Presence,
And covered my guilty head,
And received His absolution
For my sins toward the dead.

But the cruel sun was shining
In the cold and windy sky,
And Life, with his mocking voices,
Looked in to see thee die.

God came and went unheeded;
No tear repentant shone;
And he took the heart from my bosom,
And left in its place a stone.

Each trivial promise broken,
Each tender word unsaid,
Must be evermore unspoken, —
Unpardoned by the dead.

Unpardoned? No: the struggle
Of years was not in vain, —
The patience that wearies passion,
And the prayers that conquer pain.

This tardy resignation
May be the blessed sign
Of pardon and atonement,
Thy spirit sends to mine.

Now first I dare remember
That day of death and woe:
Within, the dreadful silence,
Without, the sun and snow!

1860.

DECEMBER

The beech is bare, and bare the ash,
The thickets white below;
The fir-tree scowls with hoar moustache,
He cannot sing for snow.

The body-guard of veteran pines,
A grim battalion, stands;
They ground their arms, in ordered lines,
For Winter so commands.

The waves are dumb along the shore,
The river's pulse is still;
The north-wind's bugle blows no more
Reveillé from the hill.

The rustling sift of falling snow,
The muffled crush of leaves,

These are the sounds suppressed, that show
How much the forest grieves;

But, as the blind and vacant Day
Crawls to his ashy bed,
I hear dull echoes far away,
Like drums above the dead.

Sigh with me, Pine that never changed!
Thou wear'st the Summer's hue;
Her other loves are all estranged,
But thou and I are true!

1856.

SYLVAN SPIRITS

The gray stems rise, the branches braid
A covering of deepest shade.
Beneath these old, inviolate trees
There comes no stealthy, sliding breeze,
To overhear their mysteries.

Steeped in the fragrant breath of leaves,
My heart a hermit peace receives:
The sombre forest thrusts a screen
My refuge and the world between,
And beds me in its balmy green.

No fret of life may here intrude,
To vex the sylvan solitude.
Pure spirits of the earth and air,
From hollow trunk and bosky lair
Come forth, and hear your lover's prayer!

Come, Druid soul of ancient oak,
Thou, too, hast felt the thunder-stroke;
Come, Hamadryad of the beech,
Nymph of the burning maple, teach
My heart the solace of your speech!

Alas! the sylvan ghosts preserve
The natures of the race they serve.
Not only Dryads, chaste and shy,
But piping Fauns, come dancing nigh,
And Satyrs of the shaggy thigh.

Across the calm, the holy hush,
And shadowed air, there darts a flush
Of riot, from the lawless brood,
And rebel voices in my blood
Salute these orgies of the wood.

Not sacred thoughts alone engage
The saint in silent hermitage:
The soul within him heavenward strives,
Yet strong, as in profaner lives,
The giant of the flesh survives.

From Nature, as from human haunts,
That giant draws his sustenance.
By her own elves, in woodlands wild
She sees her robes of prayer defiled:
She is not purer than her child.

1860.

THE LOST MAY

When May, with cowslip-braided locks,
Walks through the land in green attire,
And burns in meadow-grass the phlox
His torch of purple fire:

When buds have burst the silver sheath,
And shifting pink, and gray, and gold
Steal o'er the woods, while fair beneath
The bloomy vales unfold:

When, emerald-bright, the hemlock stands
New-feathered, needled new the pine;
And, exiles from the orient lands,
The turbaned tulips shine:

When wild azaleas deck the knoll,
And cinque-foil stars the fields of home,
And winds, that take the white-weed, roll
The meadows into foam:

Then from the jubilee I turn
To other Mays that I have seen,
Where more resplendent blossoms burn,
And statelier woods are green;—

Mays, when my heart expanded first,
A honeyed blossom, fresh with dew;

"WHEN BUDS HAVE BURST THE SILVER SHEATH" (Page 116)

And one sweet wind of heaven dispersed
The only clouds I knew.

For she, whose softly-murmured name
The music of the month expressed,
Walked by my side, in holy shame
Of girlish love confessed.

The budding chestnuts overhead,
Their sprinkled shadows in the lane, —
Blue flowers along the brooklet's bed, —
I see them all again!

The old, old tale of girl and boy,
Repeated ever, never old:
To each in turn the gates of joy,
The gates of heaven unfold.

And when the punctual May arrives,
With cowslip-garland on her brow,
We know what once she gave our lives
And cannot give us now.

1860.

CHURCHYARD ROSES

The woodlands wore a gloomy green,
The tawny stubble clad the hill,
And August hung her smoky screen
Above the valleys, hot and still.

No life was in the fields that day;
My steps were safe from curious eyes:
I wandered where, in churchyard clay,
The dust of love and beauty lies.

Around me thrust the nameless graves
Their fatal ridges, side by side,
So green, they seemed but grassy waves,
Yet quiet as the dead they hide.

And o'er each pillow of repose
Some innocent memento grew,
Of pansy, pink, or lowly rose,
Or hyssop, lavender, and rue.

What flower is hers, the maiden bride?
What sacred plant protects her bed?
I saw, the greenest mound beside,
A rose of dark and lurid red.

An eye of fierce demoniac stain,
It mocked my calm and chastened grief;
I tore it, stung with sudden pain,
And stamped in earth each bloody leaf.

And down upon that trampled grave
In recklessness my body cast:
"Give back the life I could not save,
Or give deliverance from the Past!"

But something gently touched my cheek,
Caressing while its touch reproved:
A rose, all white and snowy-meek,
It grew upon the dust I loved!

A breeze the holy blossom pressed
Upon my lips: Dear Saint, I cried,
Still blooms the white rose, in my breast,
Of Love, that Death has sanctified!

1860.

AUTUMNAL DREAMS

I

When the maple turns to crimson
And the sassafras to gold;
When the gentian 's in the meadow,
And the aster on the wold;
When the noon is lapped in vapor,
And the night is frosty-cold:

II

When the chestnut-burs are opened,
And the acorns drop like hail,
And the drowsy air is startled
With the thumping of the flail, —
With the drumming of the partridge
And the whistle of the quail:

III

Through the rustling woods I wander,
Through the jewels of the year,
From the yellow uplands calling,
Seeking her that still is dear:
She is near me in the autumn,
She, the beautiful, is near.

IV

Through the smoke of burning summer,
When the weary winds are still,

I can see her in the valley,
I can hear her on the hill, —
In the splendor of the woodlands,
In the whisper of the rill.

V

For the shores of Earth and Heaven
Meet, and mingle in the blue:
She can wander down the glory
To the places that she knew,
Where the happy lovers wandered
In the days when life was true.

VI

So I think, when days are sweetest,
And the world is wholly fair,
She may sometime steal upon me
Through the dimness of the air,
With the cross upon her bosom
And the amaranth in her hair.

VII

Once to meet her, ah! to meet her,
And to hold her gently fast
Till I blessed her, till she blessed me, —
That were happiness, at last:
That were bliss beyond our meetings
In the autumns of the Past!

1860.

IN WINTER

The valley stream is frozen,
The hills are cold and bare,
And the wild white bees of winter
Swarm in the darkened air.

I look on the naked forest:
Was it ever green in June?
Did it burn with gold and crimson
In the dim autumnal noon?

I look on the barren meadow:
Was it ever heaped with hay?
Did it hide the grassy cottage
Where the skylark's children lay?

I look on the desolate garden:
Is it true the rose was there?
And the woodbine's musky blossoms,
And the hyacinth's purple hair?

I look on my heart, and marvel
If Love were ever its own, —
If the spring of promise brightened,
And the summer of passion shone?
Is the stem of bliss but withered,
And the root survives the blast?
Are the seeds of the Future sleeping
Under the leaves of the Past?

Ah, yes! for a thousand Aprils
The frozen germs shall grow,
And the dews of a thousand summers
Wait in the womb of the snow!

1860.

YOUNG LOVE

We are not old, we are not cold,
Our hearts are warm and tender yet;
Our arms are eager to enfold
More bounteous love than we have met.

Still many another heart lays bare
Its secret chamber to our eyes,
Though dim with passion's lurid air,
Or pure as morns of Paradise.

They give the love, whose glory lifts
Desire beyond the realm of sense;
They make us rich with lavish gifts,
The wealth of noble confidence.

We must be happy, must be proud,
So crowned with human trust and truth;
But ah! the love that first we vowed,
The dear religion of our youth!

Voluptuous bloom and fragrance rare
The summer to its rose may bring;
Far sweeter to the wooing air
The hidden violet of the spring.

Still, still that lovely ghost appears,
Too fair, too pure, to bid depart;
No riper love of later years
Can steal its beauty from the heart.

O splendid sun that shone above!
O green magnificence of Earth!
Born once into that land of love,
No life can know a second birth.

Dear, boyish heart, that trembled so
With bashful fear and fond unrest, —
More frightened than a dove, to know
Another bird within its nest!

Sharp thrills of doubt, wild hopes that came,
Fond words addressed, — each word a pang:
Then — hearts, baptized in heavenly flame,
How like the morning stars ye sang!

Love bound ye with his holiest link,
The faith in each that ask no more,
And led ye from the sacred brink
Of mysteries he held in store.

Love led ye, children, from the bowers
Where Strength and Beauty find his crown:
Ye were not ripe for mortal flowers;
God's angel brought an amaranth down.

Our eyes are dim with fruitless tears,
Our eyes are dim, our hearts are sore:
That lost religion of our years
Comes never, never, nevermore!

1856.

THE CHAPEL

Like one who leaves the trampled street
For some cathedral, cool and dim,
Where he can hear in music beat
The heart of prayer, that beats for him;

And sees the common light of day,
Through painted panes, transfigured, shine,
And casts his human woes away,
In presence of the Woe Divine:

So I, from life's tormenting themes,
Turn where the silent chapel lies,
Whose windows burn with vanished dreams,
Whose altar-lights are memories.

There, watched by pitying cherubim,
In sacred hush, I rest awhile,
Till solemn sounds of harp and hymn
Begin to sweep the haunted aisle:

A hymn that once but breathed complaint,
And breathes but resignation now,
Since God has heard the pleading saint,
And laid His hand upon my brow.

Restored and comforted, I go
To grapple with my tasks again;
Through silent worship taught to know
The blessed peace that follows pain.

1860.

IF LOVE SHOULD COME AGAIN

If Love should come again, I ask my heart
In tender tremors, not unmixed with pain,
Couldst thou be calm, nor feel thine ancient smart,
If Love should come again?

Couldst thou unbar the chambers where his nest
So long was made, and made, alas, in vain,
Nor with embarrassed welcome chill thy guest,
If Love should come again?

Would Love his ruined quarters recognize,
Where shrouded pictures of the Past remain,
And gently turn them with forgiving eyes,
If Love should come again?

Would bliss, in milder type, spring up anew,
As silent craters with the scarlet stain
Of flowers repeat the lava's ancient hue,
If Love should come again?

Would Fate, relenting, sheathe the cruel blade
Whereby the angel of thy youth was slain
That thou might'st all possess him, unafraid,
If Love should come again?

In vain I ask: my heart makes no reply,
But echoes evermore the sweet refrain;
Till, trembling lest it seem a wish, I sigh:
If Love should come again.

"The darkness and the twilight have an end,"
Said Ernest, as he laid the book aside,
And, with a tenderness he could not hide,
Smiled, seeing in the eyes of wife and friend
The same soft dew that made his own so dim.
My heart was strangely moved, but not for him.
The holy night, the stars that twinkled faint,
Serfs of the regnant moon, the slumbering trees
And silvery hills, recalled fair memories
Of her I knew, his life's translated saint,
Who seemed too sacred now, too far removed,
To be by him lamented or beloved.
And yet she stood, I knew, by Ernest's side
Invisible, a glory in the heart,
A light of peace, the inner counterpart
Of that which round us poured its radiant tide.

We sat in silence, till a wind, astray
From some uneasy planet, shook the vines
And sprinkled us with snow of eglantines.
The laurels rustled as it passed away,
And, million-tongued, the woodland whisper crept
Of leaves that turned in sleep, from tree to tree
All down the lawn, and once again they slept.
Then Edith from her tender fantasy
Awoke, yet still her pensive posture kept,
Her white hands motionless upon her knee,
Her eyes upon a star that sparkled through
The mesh of leaves, and hummed a wandering air,
(As if the music of her thoughts it were,)
Low, sweet, and sad, until to words it grew
That made it sweeter, — words that Ernest knew:

Love, I follow, follow thee,
Wipe thine eyes and thou shalt see:
Sorrow makes thee blind to me.

I am with thee, blessing, blest;
Let thy doubts be laid to rest:
Rise, and take me to thy breast!

In thy bliss my steps behold:
Stretch thine arms and bliss enfold:
'T is thy sorrow makes me cold.

Life is good, and life is fair,
Love awaits thee everywhere:
Love! is Love's immortal prayer.

Live for love, and thou shalt be,
Loving others, true to me:
Love, I follow, follow thee!

Thus Edith sang: the stars heard, and the night,
The happy spirits, leaning from the wall
Of Heaven, the saints, and God above them all,
Heard what she sang. She ceased: her brow was bright

With other splendor than the moon's: she rose,
Gave each a hand, and silently we trod
The dry, white gravel and the dewy sod,
And silently we parted for repose.

THIRD EVENING

For days before, the wild-dove cooed for rain.
The sky had been too bright, the world too fair.
We knew such loveliness could not remain:
We heard its ruin by the flattering air
Foretold, that o'er the field so sweetly blew,
Yet came, at night, a banshee, moaning through
The chimney's throat, and at the window wailed:
We heard the tree-toad trill his piercing note:
The sound seemed near us, when, on farms remote,
The supper-horn the scattered workmen hailed:
Above the roof the eastward-pointing vane
Stood fixed: and still the wild-dove cooed for rain.

So, when the morning came, and found no fire
Upon her hearth, and wrapped her shivering form
In cloud, and rising winds in many a gyre
Of dust foreran the footsteps of the storm,
And woods grew dark, and flowery meadows chill,
And gray annihilation smote the hill,
I said to Ernest: "'T was my plan, you see:
Two days to Nature, and the third to me.
For you must stay, perforce: the day is doomed.
No visitors shall yonder valley find,
Except the spirits of the rain and wind:
Here you must bide, my friends, with me entombed
In this dim crypt, where shelved around us lie
The mummied authors." "Place me, when I die,"
Laughed Ernest, "in as fair a catacomb,
I shall not call posterity unjust,
That leaves my bones in Shakespeare's, Goethe's home,
Like king and beggar mixed in Memphian dust.
But you are right: this day we well may give
To you, dear Philip, and to those who stand
Protecting Nature with a jealous hand,
At once her subjects and her haughty lords;
Since, in the breath of their immortal words
Alone, she first begins to speak and live."

I know not, if that day of dreary rain
Was not the happiest of the happy three.
For Nature gives, but takes away again:
Sound, odor, color — blossom, cloud, and tree
Divide and scatter in a thousand rays
Our individual being: but, in days
Of gloom, the wandering senses crowding come
To the close circle of the heart. So we,
Cosily nestled in the library,
Enjoyed each other and the warmth of home.

Each window was a picture of the rain:
Blown by the wind, tormented, wet, and gray,
Losing itself in cloud, the landscape lay;
Or wavered, blurred, behind the streaming pane;
Or, with a sudden struggle, shook away
Its load, and like a foundering ship arose
Distinct and dark above the driving spray,
Until a fiercer onset came, to close
The hopeless day. The roses writhed about
Their stakes, the tall laburnums to and fro
Rocked in the gusts, the flowers were beaten low,
And from his pygmy house the wren looked out
With dripping bill: each living creature fled,
To seek some sheltering cover for its head:
Yet colder, drearier, wilder as it blew
We drew the closer, and the happier grew.

She with her needle, he with pipe and book,
My guests contented sat: my cheerful dame,
Intent on household duties, went and came,
And I unto my childless bosom took
The little two-year Arthur, Ernest's child,
A darling boy, to both his parents true, —
With father's brow, and mother's eyes of blue,
And the same dimpled beauty when he smiled.
Ah me! the father's heart within me woke:
The child that never was, I seemed to hold:
The withered tenderness that bloomed of old
In vain, revived when little Arthur spoke
Of "Papa Philip!" and his balmy kiss
Renewed lost yearnings for a father's bliss.
And something glittered in the boy's bright hair:
I kissed him back, but turned away my head
To hide the pang I would not have thee share,
Dear wife! from whom the dearest promise fled.
God cannot chide so sacred a despair,
But still I dream that somewhere there must be
The spirit of a child that waits for me.

And evening fell, and Arthur, rosy-limbed
And snowy-gowned, in human beauty sweet,
Came pattering up with little naked feet
To kiss the good-night cup, that overbrimmed
With love two fathers and two mothers gave.
The steady rain against the windows drave,
And round the house the noises of the night
Mixed in a lulling music: dry old wood
Burned on the hearth in leaps of ruddy light,
And on the table purple beakers stood
Of harmless wine, from grapes that ripened on
The sunniest hillside of the smooth Garonne.
When Arthur slept, and doors were closed, and we
Sat folded in a sweeter privacy
Than even the secret-loving moon bestows,
Spoke Ernest: "Edith, shall I read the rest?"
She, while the spirit of a happy rose

Visited her cheeks, consenting smiled, and pressed
The hand he gave. "With what I now shall read,"
He added, "Philip, you must be content.
No further runs my journal, nor, indeed,
Beyond this chapter is there further need;
Because the gift of Song was chiefly lent
To give consoling music for the joys
We lack, and not for those which we possess:
I now no longer need that gift, to bless
My heart, — *your* heart, my Edith, and your boy's!"

Therewith he read: the fingers of the rain
In light staccatos on the window played,
Mixed with the flame's contented hum, and made
Low harmonies to suit the varied strain.

THE RETURN OF SPRING

Have I passed through Death's unconscious birth,
In a dream the midnight bare?
I look on another and fairer Earth:
I breathe a wondrous air!

A spirit of beauty walks the hills,
A spirit of love the plain;
The shadows are bright, and the sunshine fills
The air with a diamond rain!

Before my vision the glories swim,
To the dance of a tune unheard:
Is an angel singing where woods are dim,
Or is it an amorous bird?

Is it a spike of azure flowers,
Deep in the meadows seen,
Or is it the peacock's neck, that towers
Out of the spangled green?

Is a white dove glancing across the blue,
Or an opal taking wing?
For my soul is dazzled through and through,
With the splendor of the Spring.

Is it she that shines, as never before,
The tremulous hills above, —
Or the heart within me, awake once more
To the dawning light of love?

1860.

MORNING

Along the east, where late the dark impended,
A dusky gleam is born:
The watches of the night are ended,
And heaven foretells the morn!

The hills of home, no longer hurled together,
In one wide blotch of night,
Lift up their heads through misty ether,
Distinct in rising light.

Then, after pangs of darkness slowly dying,
O'er the delivered world
Comes Morn, with every banner flying
And every sail unfurled!

So long the night, so chill, so blank and dreary,
I thought the sun was dead;
But yonder burn his beacons cheery
On peaks of cloudy red:

And yonder fly his scattered golden arrows,
And smite the hills with day,
While Night her vain dominion narrows
And westward wheels away.

A sweeter air revives the new creation,
The dews are tears of bliss,
And Earth, in amorous palpitation,
Receives her bridegroom's kiss.

Bathed in the morning, let my heart surrender
The doubts that darkness gave,
And rise to meet the advancing splendor —
O Night! no more thy slave.

I breathe at last, thy gloomy reign forgetting,
Thy weary watches done,
Thy last pale star behind me setting,
The freedom of the sun!

1860.

THE VISION

I

She came, long absent from my side,
And absent from my dreams, she came,
The earthly and the heavenly bride,
In maiden beauty glorified:
She looked upon me, angel-eyed:
She called me by my name.

II

But I, whose heart to meet her sprang
And shook the fragile house of dreams,
Stood, smitten with a guilty pang:
In other groves and temples rang
The songs that once for her I sang,
By woods and faery streams.

III

Her eyes had power to lift my head,
And, timorous as a truant child,
I met the sacred light they shed,
The light of heaven around her spread;
She read my face; no word she said:
I only saw she smiled.

IV

"Canst thou forgive me, Angel mine,"
I cried; "that Love at last beguiled
My heart to build a second shrine?
See, still I kneel and weep at thine,
But I am human, thou divine!"
Still silently she smiled.

V

"Dost undivided worship claim,
To keep thine altar undefiled?
Or must I bear thy tender blame,
And in thy pardon feel my shame,
Whene'er I breathe another name?"
She looked at me, and smiled.

VI

"Speak, speak!" and then my tears came fast,
My troubled heart with doubt grew wild:
"Will 't vex the love, which still thou hast,
To know that I have peace at last?"
And from my dream the vision passed,
And still, in passing, smiled.

1860.

LOVE RETURNED

I

He was a boy when first we met;
His eyes were mixed of dew and fire,
And on his candid brow was set
The sweetness of a chaste desire.
But in his veins the pulses beat
Of passion, waiting for its wing,
As ardent veins of summer heat
Throb through the innocence of spring.

II

As manhood came, his stature grew,
And fiercer burned his restless eyes,
Until I trembled, as he drew
From wedded hearts their young disguise.
Like wind-fed flame his ardor rose,
And brought, like flame, a stormy rain:
In tumult, sweeter than repose,
He tossed the souls of joy and pain.

III

So many years of absence change!
I knew him not when he returned:
His step was slow, his brow was strange,
His quiet eye no longer burned.
When at my heart I heard his knock,
No voice within his right confessed:
I could not venture to unlock
Its chambers to an alien guest.

IV

Then, at the threshold, spent and worn
With fruitless travel, down he lay:

And I beheld the gleams of morn
On his reviving beauty play.
I knelt, and kissed his holy lips,
I washed his feet with pious care;
And from my life the long eclipse
Drew off, and left his sunshine there.

V

He burns no more with youthful fire;
He melts no more in foolish tears;
Serene and sweet, his eyes inspire
The steady faith of balanced years.
His folded wings no longer thrill,
But in some peaceful flight of prayer:
He nestles in my heart so still,
I scarcely feel his presence there.

VI

O Love, that stern probation o'er,
Thy calmer blessing is secure!
Thy beauteous feet shall stray no more,
Thy peace and patience shall endure!
The lightest wind deflowers the rose,
The rainbow with the sun departs,
But thou art centred in repose,
And rooted in my heart of hearts!

1860.

A WOMAN

I

She is a woman: therefore, I a man,
In so much as I love her. Could I more,
Then I were more a man. Our natures ran
Together, brimming full, not flooding o'er
The banks of life, and evermore will run
In one full stream until our days are done.

II

She is a woman, but of spirit brave
To bear the loss of girlhood's giddy dreams;
The regal mistress, not the yielding slave
Of her ideal, spurning that which seems
For that which is, and, as her fancies fall,
Smiling: the truth of love outweighs them all.

III

She looks through life, and with a balance just
Weighs men and things, beholding as they are
The lives of others: in the common dust
She finds the fragments of the ruined star:
Proud, with a pride all feminine and sweet,
No path can soil the whiteness of her feet.

IV

The steady candor of her gentle eyes
Strikes dead deceit, laughs vanity away;
She hath no room for petty jealousies,
Where Faith and Love divide their tender sway.
Of either sex she owns the nobler part:
Man's honest brow and woman's faithful heart.

V

She is a woman, who, if Love were guide,
Would climb to power, or in obscure content
Sit down: accepting fate with changeless pride —
A reed in calm, in storm a staff unbent:
No pretty plaything, ignorant of life,
But Man's true mother, and his equal wife.

1860.

THE COUNT OF GLEICHEN

I READ that story of the Saxon knight,
Who, leaving spouse and feudal fortress, made
The Cross of Christ his guerdon in the fight,
And joined the last Crusade.

Whom, in the chase on Damietta's sands
Estrayed, the Saracens in ambush caught,

And unto Cairo, to the Soldan's hands,
A wretched captive brought:

Whom then the Soldan's child, a damsel brave,
Saw, pitied, comforted, and made him free,
And with him flew, herself a willing slave
In Love's captivity.

I read how he to bless her love was fain,
To whom his renovated life he owed,
Yet with a pang the towers beheld again
Where still his wife abode:

The wife whom first he loved: would she not scorn
The second bride he could not choose but wed,
The second mother to his children, born
In her divided bed?

Lo! at his castle's foot the noble dame
With tears of blessing, holy, undefiled
By human pain, received him when he came,
And kissed the Soldan's child!

My tears were on the pages as I read
The touching close: I made the story mine,
Within whose heart, long plighted to the dead,
Love built his living shrine.

I too had dared, a captive in the land,
To pay with love the love that broke my chain:
Would she, who waited, stretch the pardoning hand,
When I returned again?

Would she, my freedom and my bliss to know,
With my disloyalty be reconciled,
And from her bower in Eden look below,
And bless the Soldan's child?

For she is lost: but she, the later bride,
Who came my ruined fortune to restore,
Back from the desert wanders at my side,
And leads me home once more.

If human love, she sighs, could move a wife
The holiest sacrifice of love to make,
Then the transfigured angel of thy life
Is happier for thy sake!

1860.

BEFORE THE BRIDAL

Now the night is overpast,
And the mist is cleared away:
On my barren life at last
Breaks the bright, reluctant day.

Day of payment for the wrong
I was doomed so long to bear;
Day of promise, day of song,
Day that makes the future fair!

Let me wake to bliss alone:
Let me bury every fear:
What I prayed for, is my own;
What was distant, now is near.

For the happy hour that waits
No reproachful shade shall bring,
And I hear forgiving Fates
In the happy bells that ring.

Leave the song that now is mute,
For the sweeter song begun:
Leave the blossom for the fruit,
And the rainbow for the sun!

1860.

POSSESSION

I

"It was our wedding-day
A month ago," dear heart, I hear you say.
If months, or years, or ages since have passed,
I know not: I have ceased to question Time.
I only know that once there pealed a chime
Of joyous bells, and then I held you fast,

And all stood back, and none my right denied,
And forth we walked: the world was free and wide
Before us. Since that day
I count my life: the Past is washed away.

II

It was no dream, that vow:
It was the voice that woke me from a dream, —
A happy dream, I think; but I am waking now,
And drink the splendor of a sun supreme
That turns the mist of former tears to gold.
Within these arms I hold
The fleeting promise, chased so long in vain:
Ah, weary bird! thou wilt not fly again:
Thy wings are clipped, thou canst no more depart, —
Thy nest is builded in my heart!

III

I was the crescent; thou
The silver phantom of the perfect sphere,
Held in its bosom: in one glory now
Our lives united shine, and many a year —
Not the sweet moon of bridal only — we
One lustre, ever at the full, shall be:
One pure and rounded light, one planet whole,
One life developed, one completed soul!
For I in thee, and thou in me,
Unite our cloven halves of destiny.

IV

God knew His chosen time:
He bade me slowly ripen to my prime,
And from my boughs withheld the promised fruit,
Till storm and sun gave vigor to the root.
Secure, O Love! secure
Thy blessing is: I have thee day and night:
Thou art become my blood, my life, my light:
God's mercy thou, and therefore shalt endure!

1860.

UNDER THE MOON

I

From you and home I sleep afar,
Under the light of a lonely star,
Under the moon that marvels why
Away from you and home I lie.
Ah! love no language can declare,
The hovering warmth, the tender care,
The yielding, sweet, invisible air
That clasps your bosom, and fans your cheek
With the breath of words I cannot speak, —
Such love I give, such warmth impart:
The fragrance of a blossomed heart.

II

The moon looks in upon my bed,
Her yearning glory rays my head,
And round me clings, a lonely light,
The aureole of the winter night;
But in my heart a gentle pain,
A balmier splendor in my brain,
Lead me beyond the frosty plane, —
Lead me afar, to mellower skies,
Where under the moon a palace lies;
Where under the moon our bed is made,
Half in splendor and half in shade.

III

The marble flags of the corridor
Through open windows meet the floor,
And Moorish arches in darkness rise
Against the gleam of the silver skies:
Beyond, in flakes of starry light,
A fountain prattles to the night,
And dusky cypresses, withdrawn
In silent conclave, stud the lawn;
While mystic woodlands, more remote,
In seas of airy silver float,
So hung in heaven, the stars that set
Seem glossy leaves the dew has wet
On topmost boughs, and sparkling yet.

IV

In from the terraced garden blows
The spicy soul of the tuberose,

As if 't were the odor of strains that pour
From the nightingale's throat as never before;
For he sings not now of wounding thorn,
He sings as the lark in the golden morn, —
A song of joy, a song of bliss,
Passionate notes that clasp and kiss,
Perfect peace and perfect pride,
Love rewarded and satisfied,
For I see you, darling, at my side.

V

I see you, darling, at my side:
I clasp you closer, in sacred pride.
I shut my eyes, my senses fail,
Becalmed by Night's ambrosial gale.
Softer than dews the planets weep,
Descends a sweeter peace than sleep;
All wandering sounds and motions die
In the silent glory of the sky;
But, as the moon goes down the West,
Your heart, against my happy breast,
Says in its beating: Love is Rest.

1859.

THE MYSTIC SUMMER

'T is not the dropping of the flower,
The blush of fruit upon the tree,
Though summer ripens, hour by hour,
The garden's sweet maternity:

'T is not that birds have ceased to build,
And wait their brood with tender care;
That corn is golden in the field,
And clover balm is in the air; —

Not these the season's splendor bring,
And crowd with life the happy year,
Nor yet, where yonder fountains sing,
The blaze of sunshine, hot and clear.

In thy full womb, O Summer! lies
A secret hope, a joy unsung,
Held in the hush of these calm skies,
And trembling on the forest's tongue.

The lands of harvest throb anew
In shining pulses, far away;
The Night distils a dearer dew,
And sweeter eyelids has the Day.

And not in vain the peony burns,
In bursting globes, her crimson fire,
Her incense-dropping ivory urns
The lily lifts in many a spire:

And not in vain the tulips clash
In revelry the cups they hold
Of fiery wine, until they dash
With ruby streaks the splendid gold!

Send down your roots the mystic charm
That warms and flushes all your flowers,
And with the summer's touch disarm
The thraldom of the under powers,

Until, in caverns, buried deep,
Strange fragrance reach the diamond's home,
And murmurs of the garden sweep
The houses of the frighted gnome!

For, piercing through their black repose,
And shooting up beyond the sun,
I see that Tree of Life, which rose
Before the eyes of Solomon:

Its boughs, that, in the light of God,
Their bright, innumerous leaves display, —
Whose hum of life is borne abroad
By winds that shake the dead away.

And, trembling on a branch afar,
The topmost nursling of the skies,
I see my bud, the fairest star
That ever dawned for watching eyes.

Unnoticed on the boundless tree,
Its fragrant promise fills the air;
Its little bell expands, for me,
A tent of silver, lily-fair.

All life to that one centre tends;
All joy and beauty thence outflow;
Her sweetest gifts the summer spends,
To teach that sweeter bud to blow.

So, compassed by the vision's gleam,
In trembling hope, from day to day
As in some bright, bewildering dream,
The mystic summer wanes away.

1859.

THE FATHER

THE fateful hour, when Death stood by
And stretched his threatening hand in vain,
Is over now, and Life's first cry
Speaks feeble triumph through its pain.

But yesterday, and thee the Earth
Inscribed not on her mighty scroll:
To-day she opes the gate of birth,
And gives the spheres another soul.

But yesterday, no fruit from me
The rising winds of Time had hurled:
To-day, a father, — can it be
A child of mine is in the world?

I look upon the little frame,
As helpless on my arm it lies:
Thou giv'st me, child, a father's name,
God's earliest name in Paradise.

Like Him, creator too I stand:
His Power and Mystery seem more near;
Thou giv'st me honor in the land,
And giv'st my life duration here.

But love, to-day, is more than pride;
Love sees his star of triumph shine,
For Life nor Death can now divide
The souls that wedded breathe in thine:

Mine and thy mother's, whence arose
The copy of my face in thee;
And as thine eyelids first unclose,
My own young eyes look up to me.

Look on me, child, once more, once more,
Even with those weak, unconscious eyes;
Stretch the small hands that help implore;
Salute me with thy wailing cries!

This is the blessing and the prayer
A father's sacred place demands:
Ordain me, darling, for thy care,
And lead me with thy helpless hands!

1858.

THE MOTHER

PALER, and yet a thousand times more fair
Than in thy girlhood's freshest bloom, art thou:
A softer sun-flush tints thy golden hair,
A sweeter grace adorns thy gentle brow.

Lips that shall call thee "mother!" at thy breast
Feed the young life, wherein thy nature feels
Its dear fulfilment: little hands are pressed
On the white fountain Love alone unseals.

Look down, and let Life's tender day-break throw
A second radiance on thy ripened hour:
Retrace thine own forgotten advent so,
And in the bud behold thy perfect flower.

Nay, question not: whatever lies beyond
God will dispose. Sit thus, Madonna mine,
For thou art haloed with a love as fond
As Jewish Mary gave the Child Divine.

I lay my own proud title at thy feet;
Thine the first, holiest right to love shalt be:
Though in his heart our wedded pulses beat,
His sweetest life our darling draws from thee.

The father in his child beholds this truth,
His perfect manhood has assumed its reign:
Thou wear'st anew the roses of thy youth, —
The mother in her child is born again.

1858.

Thus came the Poet's Journal to an end.
His heart's completed music ceased to flow
From Ernest's lips: the tale I wished to know
Was wholly mine. "I am content, dear friend,"
I said: "to me no voice can be obscure
Wherein your nature speaks: the chords I hear,
Too far and frail to strike a stranger's ear."
With that, I bowed to Edith's forehead pure,
And kissed her with a brother's blameless kiss:
"To you the fortune of these days I owe,
My other Ernest, like him most in this,
That you can hear the cries of ancient woe
With holy pity free from any blame
Of jealous love, and find your highest bliss
To know, through you his life's fulfilment came."
"And through him, mine," the woman's heart replied:
For Love's humility is Love's true pride.

"These are your sweetest poems, and your best,"
To him I said. "I know not," answered he,
"They are my truest. I have ceased to be
The ambitious knight of Song, that shook his crest
In public tilts: the sober hermit I,
Whose evening songs but few approach to hear, —
Who, if those few should cease to lend an ear,
Would sing them to the forest and the sky
Contented: singing for myself alone.
No fear that any poet dies unknown,
Whose songs are written in the hearts that know
And love him, though their partial verdict show
The tenderness that moves the critic's blame.
Those few have power to lift his name above
Forgetfulness, to grant that noblest fame
Which sets its trumpet to the lips of Love!"

"Nay, then," said I, "you are already crowned.
If your ambition in the loving pride
Of us, your friends, is cheaply satisfied,
We are those trumpets: do you hear them sound?"
And Edith smilingly together wound
Light stems of ivy to a garland fair,
And pressed it archly on her husband's hair;
But he, with earnest voice, though in his eyes
A happy laughter shone, protesting, said:
"Respect, dear friends, the Muse's sanctities,
Nor mock, with wreaths upon a living head,
The holy laurels of the deathless Dead.
Crown Love, crown Truth when first her brow appears,
And crown the Hero when his deeds are done:
The Poet's leaves are gathered one by one,
In the slow process of the doubtful years.
Who seeks too eagerly, he shall not find:
Who, seeking not, pursues with single mind
Art's lofty aim, to him will she accord,
At her appointed time, the sure reward."

The tall clock, standing sentry in the hall,
Struck midnight: on the panes no longer beat
The weary storm: the wind began to fall,
And through the breaking darkness glimmered, sweet
With tender stars, the flying gleams of sky.
"Come, Edith, lend your voice to crown the night,
And give the new day sunny break," said I:
She listening first in self-deceiving plight
Of young maternal trouble, for a cry
From Arthur's crib, sat down in happy calm,
And sang to Ernest's heart his own thanksgiving psalm.

Thou who sendest sun and rain,
Thou who spendest bliss and pain,
Good with bounteous hand bestowing,
Evil for Thy will allowing, —
Though Thy ways we cannot see,
All is just that comes from Thee.

In the peace of hearts at rest,
In the child at mother's breast,
In the lives that now surround us,
In the deaths that sorely wound us,
Though we may not understand,
Father, we behold Thy hand!

Hear the happy hymn we raise;
Take the love which is Thy praise;
Give content in each condition;
Bend our hearts in sweet submission,
And Thy trusting children prove
Worthy of the Father's love!

1860.

OCCASIONAL POEMS

OCCASIONAL POEMS

1861–1865

THROUGH BALTIMORE

I

'T was Friday morn: the train drew near
The city and the shore.
Far through the sunshine, soft and clear,
We saw the dear old flag appear,
And in our hearts arose a cheer
For Baltimore.

II

Across the broad Patapsco's wave,
Old Fort McHenry bore
The starry banner of the brave,
As when our fathers went to save,
Or in the trenches find a grave
At Baltimore.

III

Before us, pillared in the sky,
We saw the statue soar
Of Washington, serene and high: —
Could traitors view that form, nor fly?
Could patriots see, nor gladly die
For Baltimore?

IV

"O city of our country's song!
By that swift aid we bore
When sorely pressed, receive the throng
Who go to shield our flag from wrong,
And give us welcome, warm and strong,
In Baltimore!"

V

We had no arms; as friends we came,
As brothers evermore,
To rally round one sacred name, —
The charter of our power and fame:
We never dreamed of guilt and shame
In Baltimore.

VI

The coward mob upon us fell:
McHenry's flag they tore:
Surprised, borne backward by the swell,
Beat down with mad, inhuman yell,
Before us yawned a traitorous hell
In Baltimore!

VII

The streets our soldier-fathers trod
Blushed with their children's gore;
We saw the craven rulers nod,
And dip in blood the civic rod —
Shall such things be, O righteous God,
In Baltimore?

VIII

No, never! By that outrage black,
A solemn oath we swore,
To bring the Keystone's thousands back,
Strike down the dastards who attack,
And leave a red and fiery track
Through Baltimore!

IX

Bow down, in haste, thy guilty head!
God's wrath is swift and sore:
The sky with gathering bolts is red, —
Cleanse from thy skirts the slaughter shed,
Or make thyself an ashen bed,
O Baltimore!

April, 1861.

TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

That late, in half-despair, I said:
"The Nation's ancient life is dead;
Her arm is weak, her blood is cold;
She hugs the peace that gives her gold, —

The shameful peace, that sees expire
Each beacon-light of patriot fire,
And makes her court a traitors' den," —
Forgive me this, my countrymen!

O, in your long forbearance grand,
Slow to suspect the treason planned,
Enduring wrong, yet hoping good
For sake of olden brotherhood,
How grander, how sublimer far
At the roused Eagle's call ye are,
Leaping from slumber to the fight,
For Freedom and for Chartered Right!

Throughout the land there goes a cry;
A sudden splendor fills the sky:
From every hill the banners burst,
Like buds by April breezes nurst;
In every hamlet, home, and mart,
The fire-beat of a single heart
Keeps time to strains whose pulses mix
Our blood with that of Seventy-Six!

The shot whereby the old flag fell
From Sumter's battered citadel
Struck down the lines of party creed
And made ye One in soul and deed, —
One mighty People, stern and strong
To crush the consummated wrong;
Indignant with the wrath whose rod
Smites as the awful sword of God!

The cup is full! They thought ye blind:
The props of state they undermined;
Abused your trust, your strength defied,
And stained the Nation's name of pride.
Now lift to Heaven your loyal brows,
Swear once again your fathers' vows,
And cut through traitor hearts a track
To nobler fame and freedom back!

Draw forth your million blades as one;
Complete the battle then begun!
God fights with ye, and overhead
Floats the dear banner of your dead.
They, and the glories of the Past,
The Future, dawning dim and vast,
And all the holiest hopes of Man,
Are beaming triumph in your van!

Slow to resolve, be swift to do!
Teach ye the False how fight the True!
How bucklered Perfidy shall feel
In her black heart the Patriot's steel;
How sure the bolt that Justice wings;
How weak the arm a traitor brings;
How mighty they, who steadfast stand
For Freedom's Flag and Freedom's Land!

April 30, 1861.

SCOTT AND THE VETERAN

I

An old and crippled veteran to the War Department came;
He sought the Chief who led him on many a field of fame, —
The Chief who shouted "Forward!" where'er his banner rose,
And bore its stars in triumph behind the flying foes.

II

"Have you forgotten, General," the battered soldier cried,
"The days of Eighteen Hundred Twelve, when I was at your side?
Have you forgotten Johnson, that fought at Lundy's Lane?
'T is true, I'm old and pensioned, but I want to fight again."

III

"Have I forgotten?" said the Chief; "my brave old soldier, No!
And here 's the hand I gave you then, and let it tell you so:
But you have done your share, my friend; you 're crippled, old, and gray,
And we have need of younger arms and fresher blood to-day."

IV

"But, General," cried the veteran, a flush upon his brow,
"The very men who fought with us, they say, are traitors now;
They 've torn the flag of Lundy's Lane, — our old red, white, and blue;
And while a drop of blood is left, I 'll show that drop is true.

V

"I'm not so weak but I can strike,
and I've a good old gun
To get the range of traitors' hearts,
and pick them, one by one.
Your Minié rifles, and such arms, it
a'n't worth while to try:
I could n't get the hang o' them, but
I 'll keep my powder dry!"

VI

"God bless you, comrade!" said the
Chief; "God bless your loyal
heart!
But younger men are in the field, and
claim to have their part:
They 'll plant our sacred banner in
each rebellious town,
And woe, henceforth, to any hand
that dares to pull it down!"

VII

"But, General," — still persisting, the
weeping veteran cried, —
"I 'm young enough to follow, so long
as *you* 're my guide;
And some, you know, must bite the
dust, and that, at least, can I, —
So, give the young ones place to fight,
but me a place to die!

VIII

"If they should fire on Pickens, let
the Colonel in command
Put me upon the rampart, with the
flagstaff in my hand:
No odds how hot the cannon-smoke, or
how the shells may fly;
I 'll hold the Stars and Stripes aloft,
and hold them till I die!

IX

"I'm ready, General, so you let a
post to me be given,
Where Washington can see me, as he
looks from highest heaven,
And say to Putnam at his side, or,
may be, General Wayne;
'There stands old Billy Johnson, that
fought at Lundy's Lane!'

X

"And when the fight is hottest, before
the traitors fly,
When shell and ball are screeching and
bursting in the sky,
If any shot should hit me, and lay me
on my face,
My soul would go to Washington's,
and not to Arnold's place!"

May, 1861.

MARCH

With rushing winds and gloomy skies
The dark and stubborn Winter dies:
Far-off, unseen, Spring faintly cries,
Bidding her earliest child arise:
March!

By streams still held in icy snare,
On southern hillsides, melting bare,
O'er fields that motley colors wear,
That summons fills the changeful air:
March!

What though conflicting seasons make
Thy days their field, they woo or shake
The sleeping lids of Life awake,
And hope is stronger for thy sake,
March!

Then from thy mountains, ribbed with
snow,
Once more thy rousing bugle blow,
And East and West, and to and fro,
Announce thy coming to the foe,
March!

Say to the picket, chilled and numb;
Say to the camp's impatient hum;
Say to the trumpet and the drum:
"Lift up your hearts, I come! I
come!"
March!

Cry to the waiting hosts that stray
On sandy seasides, far away,
By marshy isle and gleaming bay,
Where Southern March is Northern
May:
March!

Announce thyself with welcome noise,
Where Glory's victor-eagles poise
Above the proud, heroic boys
Of Iowa and Illinois:
March!

Then down the long Potomac's line
Shout like a storm on hills of pine,

Till ramrods ring and bayonets shine:
"Advance! The Chieftain's call is mine, —
MARCH!"

March 1, 1862.

EUPHORION

"I will not longer
Earth-bound linger:
Loosen your hold on
Hand and on ringlet,
Girdle and garment;
Leave them: they're mine!"

"Bethink thee, bethink thee
To whom thou belongest!
Say, wouldst thou wound us,
Rudely destroying
Threefold the beauty, —
Mine, his, and thine?"

FAUST, SECOND PART.

NAY, fold your arms, beloved Friends,
Above the hearts that vainly beat!
Or catch the rainbow where it bends,
And find your darling at its feet;

Or fix the fountain's varying shape,
The sunset-cloud's elusive dye,
The speech of winds that round the cape
Make music to the sea and sky:

So may you summon from the air
The loveliness that vanished hence,
And Twilight give his beauteous hair,
And Morning give his countenance,

And Life about his being clasp
Her rosy girdle once again: —
But no! let go your stubborn grasp
On some wild hope, and take your pain!

For, through the crystal of your tears,
His love and beauty fairer shine;
The shadows of advancing years
Draw back, and leave him all divine.

And Death, that took him, cannot claim
The smallest vesture of his birth, —
The little life, a dancing flame
That hovered o'er the hills of earth, —

The finer soul, that unto ours
A subtle perfume seemed to be,
Like incense blown from April flowers
Beside the scarred and stormy tree, —

The wondering eyes, that ever saw
Some fleeting mystery in the air,
And felt the stars of evening draw
His heart to silence, childhood's prayer!

Our suns were all too fierce for him;
Our rude winds pierced him through and through:
But Heaven has valleys cool and dim,
And boscage sweet with starry dew.

There knowledge breathes in balmy air,
Not wrung, as here, with panting breast:
The wisdom born of toil you share;
But he, the wisdom born of rest.

For every picture here that slept,
A living canvas is unrolled;
The silent harp he might have swept
Leans to his touch its strings of gold.

Believe, dear Friends, they murmur still
Some sweet accord to those you play,
That happier winds of Eden thrill
With echoes of the earthly lay;

That he, for every triumph won,
Whereto your poet-souls aspire,
Sees opening in that perfect sun,
Another blossom's bud of fire!

Each song, of Love and Sorrow born,
Another flower to crown your boy, —
Each shadow here his ray of morn,
Till Grief shall clasp the hand of Joy!

1862.

A THOUSAND YEARS

A THOUSAND years! Through storm and fire,
With varying fate, the work has grown,

Till Alexander crowns the spire,
Where Rurik laid the corner-stone.

The chieftain's sword, that could not rust,
But bright in constant battle grew,
Raised to the world a throne august, —
A nation grander than he knew.

Nor he, alone ; but those who have,
Through faith or deed, an equal part :
The subtle brain of Yaroslav,
Vladimir's arm and Nikon's heart :

The later hands, that built so well
The work sublime which these began,
And up from base to pinnacle
Wrought out the Empire's mighty plan.

All these, to-day, are crowned anew,
And rule in splendor where they trod,
While Russia's children throng to view
Her holy cradle, Novgorod.

From Volga's banks; from Dwina's side ;
From pine-clad Ural, dark and long;
Or where the foaming Terek's tide
Leaps down from Kasbek, bright with song :

From Altaï's chain of mountain-cones;
Mongolian deserts, far and free ;
And lands that bind, through changing zones,
The Eastern and the Western sea!

To every race she gives a home,
And creeds and laws enjoy her shade,
Till, far beyond the dreams of Rome,
Her Cæsar's mandate is obeyed.

She blends the virtues they impart,
And holds, within her life combined,
The patient faith of Asia's heart, —
The force of Europe's restless mind.

She bids the nomad's wanderings cease ;
She binds the wild marauder fast ;
Her ploughshares turn to homes of peace
The battle-fields of ages past.

And, nobler yet, she dares to know
Her future's task, nor knows in vain ;
But strikes at once the generous blow
That makes her millions men again !

So, firmer-based, her power expands,
Nor yet has seen its crowning hour, —
Still teaching to the struggling lands
That Peace the offspring is of Power.

Build, then, the storied bronze, to tell
The steps whereby this height she trod, —
The thousand years that chronicle
The toil of Man, the help of God!

And may the thousand years to come, —
The future ages, wise and free, —
Still see her flag, and hear her drum
Across the world, from sea to sea! —

Still find, a symbol stern and grand,
Her ancient eagle's wings unshorn :
One head to watch the Western land,
And one to guard the land of morn!

Novgorod, Russia, 1862.

THE NEVA

I WALK, as in a dream,
Beside the sweeping stream,
Wrapped in the summer midnight's amber haze :
Serene the temples stand,
And sleep, on either hand,
The palace-fronts along the granite quays.

Where golden domes, remote,
Above the sea-mist float,
The river-arms, dividing, hurry forth ;
And Peter's fortress-spire,
A slender lance of fire,
Still sparkles back the splendor of the North.

The pillared angel soars
Above the silent shores;
Dark from his rock the horseman hangs in air;
And down the watery line
The exiled Sphinxes pine
For Karnak's morning in the mellow glare.

I hear, amid the hush,
The restless current's rush,
The Neva murmuring through his crystal zone:
A voice portentous, deep,
To charm a monarch's sleep
With dreams of power resistless as his own.

Strong from the stormy Lake,
Pure from the springs that break
In Valdaï vales the forest's mossy floor,
Greener than beryl-stone
From fir-woods vast and lone,
In one full stream the braided currents pour.

"Build up your granite piles
Around my trembling isles,"
I hear the River's scornful Genius say:
"Raise for eternal time
Your palaces sublime,
And flash your golden turrets in the day!

"But in my waters cold
A mystery I hold, —
Of empires and of dynasties the fate:
I bend my haughty will,
Unchanged, unconquered still,
And smile to note your triumph: mine can wait.

"Your fetters I allow,
As a strong man may bow
His sportive neck to meet a child's command,
And curb the conscious power
That in one awful hour
Could whelm your halls and temples where they stand.

"When infant Rurik first
His Norseland mother nursed,
My willing flood the future chieftain bore:
To Alexander's fame
I lent my ancient name,
What time my waves ran red with Pagan gore.

"Then Peter came. I laughed
To feel his little craft
Borne on my bosom round the marshy isles:
His daring dream to aid,
My chafing floods I laid,
And saw my shores transfixed with arrowy piles.

"I wait the far-off day
When other dreams shall sway
The House of Empire builded by my side, —
Dreams that already soar
From yonder palace-door,
And cast their wavering colors on my tide, —

"Dreams where white temples rise
Below the purple skies,
By waters blue, which winter never frets, —
Where trees of dusky green
From terraced gardens lean,
And shoot on high the reedy minarets.

"Shadows of mountain-peaks
Vex my unshadowed creeks;
Dark woods o'erhang my silvery birchen bowers;
And islands, bald and high,
Break my clear round of sky,
And ghostly odors blow from distant flowers.

"Then, ere the cold winds chase
These visions from my face,
I see the starry phantom of a crown,
Beside whose blazing gold
This cheating pomp is cold,
A moment hover, as the veil drops down.

"Build on! That day shall see
My streams forever free,
Swift as the wind, and silent as the snow,
The frost shall split each wall:
Your domes shall crack and fall:
My bolts of ice shall strike your barriers low!"

On palace, temple, spire,
The morn's descending fire
In thousand sparkles o'er the city fell:
Life's rising murmur drowned
The Neva where he wound
Between his isles: he keeps his secret well.

1863.

A STORY FOR A CHILD

I

LITTLE one, come to my knee!
Hark how the rain is pouring
Over the roof, in the pitch-black night,
And the wind in the woods a-roaring!

II

Hush, my darling, and listen,
Then pay for the story with kisses:
Father was lost in the pitch-black night,
In just such a storm as this is!

III

High up on the lonely mountains,
Where the wild men watched and waited;
Wolves in the forest, and bears in the bush,
And I on my path belated.

IV

The rain and the night together
Came down, and the wind came after,
Bending the props of the pine-tree roof
And snapping many a rafter.

V

I crept along in the darkness,
Stunned, and bruised, and blinded —
Crept to a fir with thick-set boughs,
And a sheltering rock behind it.

VI

There, from the blowing and raining
Crouching, I sought to hide me:
Something rustled, two green eyes shone,
And a wolf lay down beside me.

VII

Little one, be not frightened;
I and the wolf together,
Side by side, through the long, long night,
Hid from the awful weather.

VIII

His wet fur pressed against me;
Each of us warmed the other:
Each of us felt, in the stormy dark,
That beast and man was brother.

IX

And when the falling forest
No longer crashed in warning,
Each of us went from our hiding-place
Forth in the wild, wet morning.

X

Darling, kiss me payment!
Hark how the wind is roaring:
Father's house is a better place
When the stormy rain is pouring!

1861.

FROM THE NORTH

ONCE more without you! Sighing,
Dear, once more,
For all the sweet, accustomed ministries
Of wife and mother: not as when the seas
That parted us my tender message bore
From the gray olives of the Cretan shore
To those that hide the broken Phidian frieze
Of our Athenian home, — but far degrees,
Wide plains, great forests, part us now.
My door
Looks on the rushing Neva, cold and clear:
The swelling domes in hovering splendor lie
Like golden bubbles, eager to be gone;
But the chill crystal of the atmosphere
Withholds them, and along the northern sky
The amber midnight smiles in dreams of dawn.

1862.

A WEDDING SONNET

TO T. B. A. AND L. W.

Sad Autumn, drop thy weedy crown forlorn,
Put off thy cloak of cloud, thy scarf of mist,
And dress in gauzy gold and amethyst
A day benign, of sunniest influence born,
As may befit a Poet's marriage morn!
Give buds another dream, another tryst
To loving hearts, and print on lips unkissed
Betrothal-kisses, laughing Spring to scorn!
Yet, if unfriendly thou, with sullen skies,
Bleak rains, or moaning winds, dost menace wrong,
Here art thou foiled: a bridal sun shall rise
And bridal emblems unto these belong.
Round her the sunshine of her beauty lies,
And breathes round him the spring-time of his song!

1865.

CHRISTMAS SONNETS

I

TO G. H. B.

If that my hand, like yours, dear George, were skilled
To win from Wordsworth's scanty plot of ground
A shining harvest, such as you have found,
Where strength and grace, fraternally fulfilled,
As in those sheaves whose rustling glories gild
The hills of August, folded are, and bound;
So would I draw my loving tillage round
Its borders, bid the gentlest rains be spilled,
The goldenest suns its happy growth compel,
And bind for you the ripe, redundant grain:
But, ah! you stand amid your songful sheaves,
So rich, this weed-born flower you might disdain,
Save that of me its growth and color tell,
And of my love some perfume haunt its leaves!

II

TO R. H. S.

The years go by, old Friend! Each, as it fleets,
Moves to a farther, fairer realm, the time
When first we twain the pleasant land of Rhyme
Discovered, choosing side by side our seats
Below our separate Gods: in midnight streets
And haunted attics flattered by the chime
Of silver words, and, fed by faith sublime,
I Shelley's mantle wore, you that of Keats, —
Dear dreams, that marked the Muse's childhood then,
Nor now to be disowned! The years go by;
The clear-eyed Goddess flatters us no more;
And yet, I think, in soberer aims of men,
And Song's severer service, you and I
Are nearer, dearer, faithfuller than before.

III

TO E. C. S.

When days were long, and o'er that farm of mine,
Green Cedarcroft, the summer breezes blew,
And from the walnut shadows I and you,
Dear Edmund, saw the red lawn-roses shine,
Or followed our idyllic Brandywine
Through meadows flecked with many a flowery hue,
To where with wild Arcadian pomp I drew

Your Bacchic march among the startled kine,
You gave me, linked with old Mæonides,
Your loving sonnet, — record dear and true
Of days as dear: and now, when suns are brief,
And Christmas snows are on the naked trees,
I give you this, — a withered winter leaf,
Yet with your blossom from one root it grew.

IV

TO J. L. G.

If I could touch with Petrarch's pen this strain
Of graver song, and shape to liquid flow
Of soft Italian syllables the glow
That warms my heart, my tribute were not vain:
But how shall I such measured sweetness gain
As may your golden nature fitly show,
And with the heart-light shine, that fills you so,
It pales the graces of the cultured brain?
Long have I known, Love better is than Fame,
And Love hath crowned you: yet if any bay
Cling to my chaplet when the years have fled,
And I am dust, may this which bears your name
Cling latest, that my love's result shall stay
When that which mine ambition wrought is dead.

A STATESMAN

He knew the mask of principle to wear,
And power accept while seeming to decline:
So cunningly he wrought, with tools so fine,
Setting his courses with so frank an air,
(Yet most secure when seeming most to dare,)
He did deceive us all: with mien benign
His malice smiled, his cowardice the sign
Of courage took, his selfishness grew fair,
So deftly could his foiled ambition show
A modest acquiescence. Now, 't is clear
What man he is, — how false his high report;
Mean to the friend, caressing to the foe;
Plotting the mischief which he feigns to fear;
Chief Eunuch, were but ours the Sultan's court!

1865.

CHANT

FOR THE BRYANT FESTIVAL

NOVEMBER 5, 1864

One hour be silent, sounds of war!
Delay the battle he foretold,
And let the Bard's triumphant star
Send down from heaven its milder gold!

Let Fame, that plucks but laurel now
For loyal heroes, turn away,
And twine, to crown our poet's brow,
The greener garland of the bay.

For he, our earliest minstrel, fills
The land with echoes, sweet and long,
Gives language to her silent hills,
And bids her rivers move to song.

The Phosphor of the Nation's dawn,
Sole risen above our tuneless coast,
As Hesper now, his lamp burns on, —
The leader of the starry host.

He sings of mountains and of streams,
Of storied field and haunted dale,
Yet hears a voice through all his dreams,
Which says: "The Good shall yet prevail."

He sings of Truth, he sings of Right;
He sings of Freedom, and his strains
March with our armies to the fight,
Ring in the bondman's falling chains.

God, bid him live, till in her place
Truth, crushed to earth, again shall rise, —
The "mother of a mighty race"
Fulfil her poet's prophecies!

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

1861–1871

A DAY IN MARCH

Look forth, Beloved, from thy mansion high,
By soft airs fanned,
And see the summer from her bluest sky
Surprise the land!

See how the bare hills bask in purple bliss
Along the south:
On the brown death of winter falls a kiss
From summer's mouth!

From pines that weave, among the ravished trees,
Their phantom bowers,
A murmur comes, as sought the ghosts of bees
The ghosts of flowers.

Though yet no blood may swell the willow rind,
No grass-blade start,
A dream of blossoms fills the yearning wind,
Of love, my heart.

Look forth, Beloved, through the tender air,
And let thine eyes
The violets be, it finds not anywhere,
And scentless dies.

Look, and thy trembling locks of plenteous gold
The day shall see,
And search no more where first, on yonder wold,
The cowslips be.

Look, and the wandering summer not forlorn
Shall turn aside,
Content to leave her million flowers unborn,
Her songs untried.

Drowsy with life and not with sleep or death
I dream of thee:
Breathe forth thy being in one answering breath,
And come to me!

Come forth, Beloved! Love's exultant sign
Is in the sky:
And let me lay my panting heart to thine
And die!

1861.

THE TEST

"Farewell awhile, my bonnie darling!
One long, close kiss, and I depart:
I hear the angry trumpet snarling,
The drum-beat tingles at my heart."

Behind him, softest flutes were breathing,
Across the vale their sweet recall;
Before him burst the battle, seething
In flame beneath its thunder-pall.

All sights and sounds to stay invited;
The meadows tossed their foam of flowers;
The lingering Day beheld, delighted,
The dances of his amorous Hours.

He paused: again the foul temptation
Assailed his heart, so firm before,
And tender dreams, of Love's creation,
Persuaded from the peaceful shore.

"But no!" he sternly cried; "I follow
The trumpet, not the shepherd's reed.
Let idlers pipe in pastoral hollow, —
Be mine the sword, and mine the deed!

"Farewell to Love!" he murmured, sighing:
"Perchance I lose what most is dear:
But better there, struck down and dying,
Than be a man, and wanton here!"

He went where battle's voice was loudest;
He pressed where danger nearest came;
His hand advanced, among the proudest,
Their banner through the lines of flame.

And there, when wearied Carnage faltered,
He, foremost of the fallen, lay,
While Night looked down with brow unaltered,
And breathed the battle's dust away.

There lying, sore from wounds untended,
A vision crossed the starry gleam:
The girl he loved beside him bended,
And kissed him in his fever-dream.

"O love!" she cried, "you fled, to find me;
I left with you the daisied vale;
I turned from flutes that wailed behind me,
To hear your trumpet's distant hail.

"Your tender vows, your peaceful kisses,
They scarce outlived the moment's breath;
But now we clasp immortal blisses
Of Passion proved on brinks of Death!

"No fate henceforward shall estrange her
Who finds a heart more brave than fond;
For Love, forsook this side of danger,
Waits for the man who goes beyond!"

1862.

CANOPUS

A LEAF FROM THE PAST

Above the palms, the peaks of pearly gray
That hang, like dreams, along the slumbering skies,
An urn of fire that never burns away,
I see Canopus rise.

An urn of light, a golden-hearted torch,
Voluptuous, drowsy-throbbing mid the stars,
As, incense-fed, from Aphrodite's porch
Lifted, to beacon Mars.

Is it from songs and stories of the Past,
With names and scenes that make our planet fair, —
From Babylonian splendors, vague and vast,
And flushed Arabian air:

Or sprung from richer longings of the brain
And spices of the blood, this hot desire
To lie beneath that mellow lamp again
And breathe its languid fire?

From tales of nights when watching David saw
Its amorous ray on bright Bathsheba's head;
Or Charmian stole, the golden gauze to draw
Round Cleopatra's bed?

Or when white-breasted Paris touched the lone
Laconian isle, where stayed his flying oars,
And Helen breathed the scent of violets, blown
Along the bosky shores?

Or Kalidasa's maiden, wandering through
The moonlit jungles of the Indian lands,

While shamed mimosas from her form withdrew
Their thin and trembling hands?

For Fancy takes from Passion power to build
A brighter fane than bloodless Thought decrees,
And loves to see its spacious chambers filled
With tropic tapestries.

And, past those halls which for itself the mind
Builds, permanent as marble, and as cold,
In warm surprises of the blood we find
The sumptuous dream unfold!

There shines the leaf and bursts the blossom sheath
On hills deep-mantled in eternal June,
Or wave their whispering silver, underneath
The rainbow-cinctured moon.

Around the pillars of the palm-tree bower
The orchids cling, in rose and purple spheres;
Shield-broad the lily floats; the aloe flower
Foredates its hundred years.

Along the lines of coral, white and warm,
Breaks the white surf; hushed is the glassy air,
And only mellower murmurs tell that storm
Is raging otherwhere.

The mansion gleams with dome and arch Moresque —
Ah, bliss to lie beside the jasper urn
Of founts, and through the open arabesque
To watch Canopus burn!

To sit at feasts, and fluid odors drain
Of daintiest nectar that from grape is caught,
While faint narcotics cheat the idle brain
With phantom shapes of thought;

Or, listening to the sweet, seductive voice,
No will hath silenced, since the world began,
To weigh delight unchallenged, making choice
Of earlier joys of man!

Permit the dream: our natures twofold are.
Sense hath its own ideals, which prepare
A rosy background for the soul's white star,
Whereon it shines more fair.

Not crystal runs, dissolved from mountain snow,
The poet's blood; but amber, musk, impart
Their scents, and gems their orbed or shivered glow,
To feed his tropic heart.

While Form and Color undivorced remain
In every planet gilded by the sun,
His craft shall forge the radiant marriage-chain
That makes them purely One!

1865.

CUPIDO

THE REVIVAL OF AN ANTIQUATED FIGURE, AFTER READING THE VIEWS OF CERTAIN WOMEN ON MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

I

Roseate darling,
Dimpled with laughter,
Nursed on the bosom
Pierced by thee after;
Fed with the rarest
Milk of the fairest
Fond Aphrodite,
Child as thou art, as a god thou art mighty!

II

Thou art the only
Demigod left us;
Fate hath bereft us,
Science made lonely.

Visions and fables
Shrink from our portals;
Long have we banished
The stately Immortals;
Yet, when we sent them
Trooping to Hades —
Olympian gentlemen,
Paphian ladies —
Thou hadst re-risen,
Ere the dark prison
Closed for the last time,
Slipped from the gate and returned to thy pastime!

III

Ever a mystery,
All of our history
Brightens with thee!
Systems have chained us,
Rulers restrained us,
Fortune disdained us,
Still thou wert free!
Lofty or lowly,
Brutish or holy,
Spacious or narrow,
Never a life was secure from thy arrow!

IV

Ah, but they 've told us
Love is a system!
They would withhold us
When we have kissed him!
All that perplexes
Sweetly the sexes
They would control,
And with Affinity
Drive the Divinity
Out of the soul!
Better, they say, is
Phryne or Laïs
Than the immutable
Faith, and its suitable
Vow, he hath taught us;
Foolish the tender
Pang, the surrender,
When he has caught us;
Fancies and fetters are all he has brought us.

V

Future parental,
Physical, mental
Laws they prescribe us;
And with ecstatic
Strict mathematic
Blisses would bribe us.
Alkali, acid,
They with a placid
Mien would unite,
And the wild rapture
Of chasing and capture
Curb with a right;
Measuring, dealing
Even the kiss of the twilight of feeling!

VI

Who shall deliver
Thee from their credo?
Rent is thy quiver,
Darling Cupido!
Naked, yet blameless,
Tricksily aimless,
Secretly sure,
Who, then, thy plighting,
Wilful uniting,
Now will endure?
Now, when experiment
Based upon Science
Sets at defiance,
Harshly, thy merriment,
Who shall caress thee
Warm in his bosom, and bliss thee and bless thee?

VII

Ever 't is May-time!
Ever 't is play-time
Of Beauty and Youth!
Freed from confusion,
Hides in illusion
Nature her truth.
Books and discourses,
What can they tell us?
Blood with its forces
Still will compel us!
Cold ones may fly to
Systems, or try to;
Innocent fancy
Still will enwind us,
Love's necromancy
Snare us and bind us,
Systems and rights lie forgotten behind us.

1870.

THE SLEEPER

The glen was fair as some Arcadian dell,
All shadow, coolness, and the rush of streams,
Save where the sprinkled blaze of noonday fell

Like stars within its under-sky of dreams.
Rich leaf and blossomed grape and fern-tuft made
Odors of life and slumber through the shade.

"O peaceful heart of Nature!" was my sigh;
"How dost thou shame, in thine unconscious bliss,
Thy sure accordance with the changing sky,
O quiet heart, the restless beat of this!
Take thou the place false friends have vacant left,
And bring thy bounty to repair the theft!"

So sighing, weary with the unsoothed pain
From insect-stings of women and of men,
Uneasy heart and ever-baffled brain,
I breathed the lonely beauty of the glen,
And from the fragrant shadows where she stood
Evoked the shyest Dryad of the wood.

Lo! on a slanting rock, outstretched at length,
A woodman lay in slumber, fair as death,
His limbs relaxed in all their supple strength,
His lips half parted with his easy breath,
And by one gleam of hovering light caressed
His bare brown arm and white uncovered breast.

"Why comes he here?" I whispered, treading soft
The hushing moss beside his flinty bed;
"Sweet are the haycocks in yon clover-croft, —
The meadow turf were light beneath his head:
Could he not slumber by the orchard-tree,
And leave this quiet unprofaned for me?"

But something held my step. I bent, and scanned
(As one might view a veiny agate-stone)
The hard, half-open fingers of his hand,
Strong cords of wrist, knit round the jointed bone,
And sunburnt muscles, firm and full of power,
But harmless now as petals of a flower.

There lay the unconscious Life, but, ah! more fair
Than ever blindly stirred in leaf and bark, —
Warmth, beauty, passion, mystery everywhere,
Beyond the Dryad's feebly burning spark
Of cold poetic being: who could say
If here the angel or the wild beast lay?

Then I looked up, and read his helpless face:
Peace touched the temples and the eyelids, slept
On drooping lashes, made itself a place
In smiles that slowly to the corners crept
Of parting lips, and came and went, to show
The happy freedom of the heart below.

A holy rest! wherein the man became
Man's interceding representative:
In Sleep's white realm fell off his mask of blame,
And he was sacred, for that he did live.
His presence marred no more the quiet deep,
But all the glen became a shrine of Sleep!

And then I mused: how lovely this repose!
How the shut sense its dwelling consecrates!
Sleep guards itself against the hands of foes;
Its breath disarms the Envies and the Hates

Which haunt our lives: were this mine enemy,
My stealthy watch could not less reverent be!

So hang their hands, that would have done me wrong;
So sweet their breathing, whose unkindly spite
Provoked the bitter measures of my song;
So might they slumber, sacred in my sight,
Or I in theirs: — why waste contentious breath?
Forget, like Sleep; and then forgive, like Death!

1865.

MY FARM: A FABLE

Within a green and pleasant land
I own a favorite plantation,
Whose woods and meads, if rudely planned,
Are still, at least, my own creation.
Some genial sun or kindly shower
Has here and there wooed forth a flower,
And touched the fields with expectation.

I know what feeds the soil I till,
What harvest-growth it best produces:
My forests shape themselves at will,
My grapes mature their proper juices.
I know the brambles and the weeds,
But know the fruits and wholesome seeds, —
Of those the hurt, of these the uses.

And working early, working late,
Directing crude and random Nature,
'T is joy to see my small estate
Grow fairer in the slightest feature.
If but a single wild-rose blow,
Or fruit-tree bend with April snow,
That day am I the happiest creature!

But round the borders of the land
Dwell many neighbors, fond of roving;
With curious eye and prying hand
About my fields I see them moving.
Some tread my choicest herbage down,
And some of weeds would weave a crown,
And bid me wear it, unreproving.

"What trees!" says one; "who ever saw
A grove, like this, of *my* possessing?
This vale offends my upland's law;
This sheltered garden needs suppressing.
My rocks this grass would never yield,
And how absurd the level field!
What here will grow is past my guessing."

"Behold the slope!" another cries:
"No sign of bog or meadow near it!
A varied surface I despise:
There's not a stagnant pool to cheer it!"
"Why plough at all?" remarked a third.
"Heaven help the man!" a fourth I heard, —
"His farm 's a jungle: let him clear it!"

No friendly counsel I disdain:
My fields are free to every comer;
Yet that which one to praise is fain
But makes another's visage glummer.
I bow them out, and welcome in,
But while I seek some truth to win,
Goes by, unused, the golden summer!

Ah! vain the hope to find in each
The wisdom each denies the other;
These mazes of conflicting speech
All theories of culture smother.
I'll raise and reap, with honest hand,
The native harvest of my land;
Do thou the same, my wiser brother!

1866.

HARPOCRATES

"The rest is silence." — HAMLET.

I

THE message of the god I seek
In voice, in vision, or in dream,
Alike on frosty Dorian peak,
Or by the slow Arcadian stream:
Where'er the oracle is heard,
I bow the head and bend the knee;
In dream, in vision, or in word,
The sacred secret reaches me.

II

Athwart the dim Trophonian caves,
Bat-like, the gloomy whisper flew;
The lisping plash of Paphian waves
Bathed every pulse in fiery dew:
From Phœbus, on his cloven hill,
A shaft of beauty pierced the air,
And oaks of gray Dodona still
Betrayed the Thunderer's presence there.

III

The warmth of love, the grace of art,
The joys that breath and blood express,
The desperate forays of the heart
Into an unknown wilderness, —
All these I know: but sterner needs
Demand the knowledge which must dower
The life that on achievement feeds,
The grand activity of power.

IV

What each reveals the shadow throws
Of something unrevealed behind;
The Secret's lips forever close
To mock the secret undivined:
Thence late I came, from weary dreams
The son of Isis to implore,
Whose temple-front of granite gleams
Across the Desert's yellow floor.

V

Lo! where the sand, insatiate, drinks
The steady splendor of the air,
Crouched on her heavy paws, the Sphinx
Looks forth with old, unwearied stare!
Behind her, on the burning wall,
The long processions flash and glow:
The pillared shadows of the hall
Sleep with their lotus-crowns below.

VI

A square of dark beyond, the door
Breathes out the deep adytum's gloom:
I cross the court's deserted floor,
And stand within the sacred room.
The priests repose from finished rite;
No echo rings from pavements trod;
And sits alone, in swarthy light,
The naked child, the temple's god.

VII

No sceptre, orb, or mystic toy
Proclaims his godship, young and warm
He sits alone, a naked boy,
Clad in the beauty of his form.
Dark, solemn stars, of radiance mild,
His eyes illume the golden shade,
And sweetest lips that never smiled
The finger hushes, on them laid.

VIII

O, never yet in trance or dream
That falls when crowned desire has died,
So breathed the air of power supreme,
So breathed, and calmed, and satisfied!
Those mystic lips were not unsealed
The temple's awful hush to break,
But unto inmost sense revealed,
The deity his message spake:

IX

"If me thou knowest, stretch thy hand
And my possessions thou shalt reach:
I grant no help, I break no band,
I sit above the gods that teach.
The latest-born, my realm includes
The old, the strong, the near, the far, —
Serene beyond their changeful moods,
And fixed as Night's unmoving star.

X

"A child, I leave the dance of Earth
To be my hornèd mother's care:
My father Ammon's Bacchic mirth,
Delighting gods, I may not share.

I turn from Beauty, Love, and Power,
In singing vale, on laughing sea;
From Youth and Hope, and wait the hour
When weary Knowledge turns to me.

XI

"Beneath my hand the sacred springs
Of Man's mysterious being burst,
And Death within my shadow brings
The last of life, to greet the first.
There is no god, or grand or fair,
On Orcan or Olympian field,
But must to me his treasures bear,
His one peculiar secret yield.

XII

"I wear no garment, drop no shade
Before the eyes that all things see;
My worshippers, howe'er arrayed,
Come in their nakedness to me.
The forms of life like gilded towers
May soar, in air and sunshine drest, —
The home of Passions and of Powers, —
Yet mine the crypts whereon they rest.

XIII

"Embracing all, sustaining all,
Consoling with unuttered lore,
Who finds me in my voiceless hall
Shall need the oracles no more.
I am the knowledge that insures
Peace, after Thought's bewildering range;
I am the patience that endures;
I am the truth that cannot change!"

1865.

RUN WILD

HERE was the gate. The broken paling,
As if before the wind, inclines,
The posts half rotted, and the pickets failing,
Held only up by vines.

The plum-trees stand, though gnarled and speckled
With leprosy of old disease;
By cells of wormy life the trunks are freckled,
And moss enfolds their knees.

I push aside the boughs and enter:
Alas! the garden's nymph has fled,
With every charm that leaf and blossom lent her,
And left a hag instead.

Some female satyr from the thicket,
Child of the bramble and the weed,
Sprang shouting over the unguarded wicket
With all her savage breed.

She banished hence the ordered graces
That smoothed a way for Beauty's feet,
And gave her ugliest imps the vacant places,
To spoil what once was sweet.

Here, under rankling mulleins, dwindle
The borders, hidden long ago;
Here shoots the dock in many a rusty spindle,
And purslane creeps below.

The thyme runs wild, and vainly sweetens,
Hid from its bees, the conquering grass;
And even the rose with briery menace threatens
To tear me as I pass.

Where show the weeds a grayer color,
The stalks of lavender and rue
Stretch like imploring arms, — but, ever duller,
They slowly perish too.

Only the pear-tree's fruitless scion
Exults above the garden's fall;
Only the thick-maned ivy, like a lion,
Devours the crumbling wall.

What still survives becomes as savage
As that which entered to destroy,
Taking an air of riot and of ravage,
Of strange and wanton joy.

No copse unpruned, no mountain hollow,
So lawless in its growth may be:
Where the wild weeds have room to chase and follow,
They graceful are, and free.

But Nature here attempts revenges
For her obedience unto toil;
She brings her rankest life with loathsome changes
To smite the fattened soil.

For herbs of sweet and wholesome savor
She plants her stems of bitter juice;
From flowers she steals the scent, from fruits the flavor,
From homelier things the use.

Her angel is a mocking devil,
If once the law relax its bands;
In Man's neglected fields she holds her revel,
Takes back, and spoils his lands.

Once having broken ground, he never
The virgin sod can plant again:
The soil demands his services forever, —
And God gives sun and rain!

1868.

SONNET

WHERE should the Poet's home and household be?
Beneath what skies, in what untroubled air
Sings he for very joy of songs so fair
That in their steadfast laws he most is free?
In woods remote, where darkly tree on tree
Let fall their curtained shadows, to ensnare
His dreams, or hid in Fancy's happiest lair, —
Some laughing island of the stormless sea?
Ah, never such to him their welcome gave!
But, flattered by the gods in finer scorn,
He drifts upon the world's unresting wave,
As drifts a sea-flower, by the tempest torn
From sheltered porches of the coral cave
Where it expands, of calm and silence born.

1866.

"CASA GUIDI WINDOWS"

RETURNED to warm existence, — even as one
Sentenced, then blotted from the headsman's book,
Accepts with doubt the life again begun, —
I leave the duress of my couch, and look
Through Casa Guidi windows to the sun.

A fate like Farinata's held me fast
In some devouring pit of fever-fire,
Until, from ceaseless forms of toil that cast
Their will upon me, whirled in endless gyre,
The Spirit of the House brought help at last.

With Giotto wrestling, through the desperate hours
A thousand crowded frescos must I paint,
Or snatch from twilights dim, and dusky bowers,
Alternate forms of bacchanal and saint,
The streets of Florence and her beauteous towers.

Weak, wasted with those torments of the brain,
The circles of the Tuscan master's hell
Were dreams no more; but when their fiery strain
Was fiercest, deep and sudden stillness fell
Athwart the storm, and all was peace again.

She came, whom Casa Guidi's chambers knew,
And know more proudly, an Immortal, now;
The air without a star was shivered through
With the resistless radiance of her brow,
And glimmering landscapes from the darkness grew.

Thin, phantom-like; and yet she brought me rest.
Unspoken words, an understood command

Sealed weary lids with sleep, together pressed
In clasping quiet wandering hand to hand,
And smoothed the folded cloth above the breast.

Now, looking through these windows, where the day
Shines on a terrace splendid with the gold
Of autumn shrubs, and green with glossy bay,
Once more her face, re-made from dust, I hold
In light so clear it cannot pass away: —

The quiet brow; the face so frail and fair
For such a voice of song; the steady eye,
Where shone the spirit fated to outwear
Its fragile house; — and on her features lie
The soft half-shadows of her drooping hair.

Who could forget those features, having known?
Whose memory do his kindling reverence wrong
That heard the soft Ionian flute, whose tone
Changed with the silver trumpet of her song?
No sweeter airs from woman's lips were blown.

Ah, in the silence she has left behind
How many a sorrowing voice of life is still!
Songless she left the land that cannot find
Song for its heroes; and the Roman hill,
Once free, shall for her ghost the laurel wind.

The tablet tells you, "Here she wrote and died,"
And grateful Florence bids the record stand:
Here bend Italian love and English pride
Above her grave, — and one remoter land,
Free as her prayers would make it, at their side.

I will not doubt the vision: yonder see
The moving clouds that speak of freedom won!
And life, new-lighted, with a lark-like glee
Through Casa Guidi windows hails the sun,
Grown from the rest her spirit gave to me.

Florence, 1867.

PANDORA

Italy, loved of the sun,
Wooed of the sweet winds and wed by the sea,
When, since the nations begun,
Was other inheritance like unto thee?

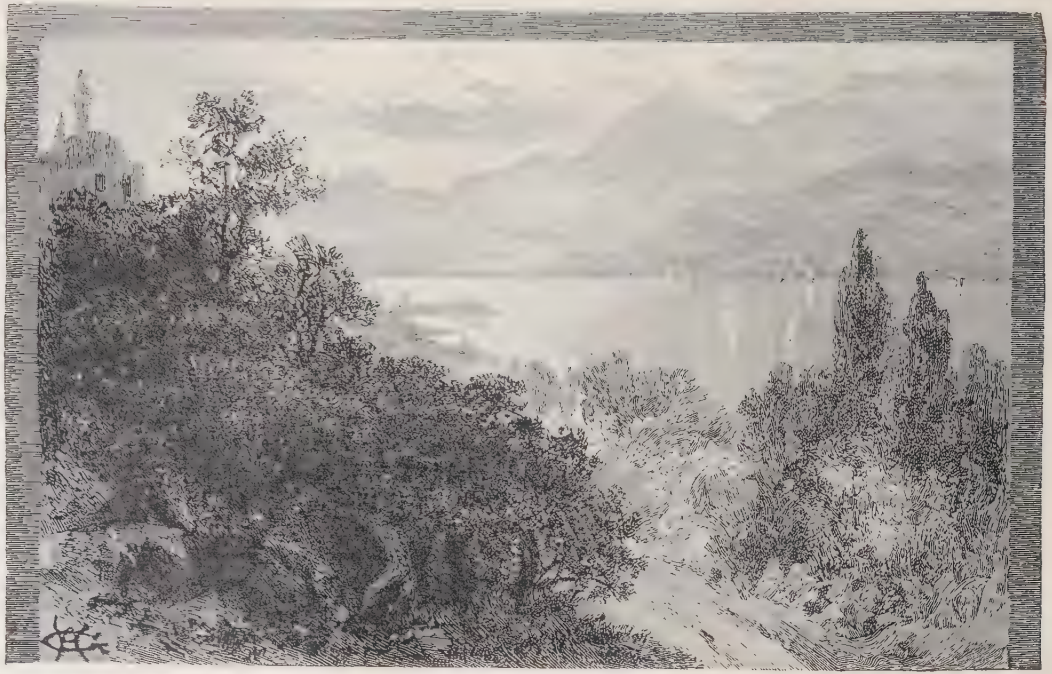
Splendors of sunshine and snows
Flash from thy peaks to thy bath in the brine;
Thine are the daisy and rose,
The grace of the palm and the strength of the pine:

Orchard and harvested plain;
Lakes, by the touch of the tempest unstirred;
Dells where the Dryads remain,
And mountains that rise to a music unheard?

Generous gods, at thy birth,
Heaped on thy cradle with prodigal hand
Gifts, and the darling of earth
Art thou, and wast ever, O ravishing land!

Strength from the Thunderer came,
Pride from the goddess that governs his board;
While, in his forges of flame,
Hephæstus attempered thine armor and sword.

Lo! Aphrodite her zone,
Winning all love to thy loveliness, gave;



"ITALY LOVED OF THE SUN" (Page 156)

Leaving her Paphian throne
To breathe on thy mountains and brighten thy wave.

Bacchus the urns of his wine
Gave, and the festivals crowning thy toil;
Ceres, the mother divine,
Bestowed on thee bounties of corn and of oil.

Phœbus the songs that inspire,
Caught from the airs of Olympus, conferred:
Hermes, the sweetness and fire
That pierce in the charm of the eloquent word.

So were thy graces complete;
Yea, and, though ruined, they fascinate now:
Beautiful still are thy feet,
And girt with the gold of lost lordship thy brow.

1868.

SORRENTO

I

The gods are gone, the temples overthrown,
The storms of time the very rocks have shaken:
The Past is mute, save where some mouldy stone
Speaks to confuse, like speech by age o'ertaken.
The pomp that crowned the winding shore
Has fled for evermore:
Its old magnificence shall never reawaken.

II

Where once, against the Grecian ships arrayed,
The Oscan warriors saw their javelins hurtle,
The farmer prunes his olives, and the maid
Trips down the lanes in flashing vest and kirtle:
The everlasting laurel now
Forgets Apollo's brow,
And, dedicate no more to Venus, blooms the myrtle.

III

Yet still, as long ago, when this high coast
Phœnician strangers saw, and flying Dardans,
The bounteous earth fulfils her ancient boast
In mellow fields which Winter never hardens;
And daisy, lavender, and rose
Perpetual buds unclose,
To flood with endless balm the tiers of hanging gardens.

IV

From immemorial rocks the daffodil
Beckons with scented stars, an unreached wonder:
On sunny banks their wine the hyacinths spill,
And self-betraying violets bloom thereunder;
While near and threatening, dim and deep,
The wave assails the steep,
Or booms in hollow caves with sound of smothered thunder.

V

Here Nature, dropping once her ordered plan,
Fashioned all lovely things that most might please her —
A playground guarded from the greed of man,
The childish gauds, wherewith he would appease her:
Her sweetest air, her softest wave
Reluctantly she gave
To grace the wealth of Rome, to heal the languid Cæsar.

VI

She stationed there Vesuvius, to be
Contrasted horror to her idyl tender:
Across the azure pavement of the sea
She raised a cape for Baïæ's marble splendor;
And westward, on the circling zone,
To front the seas unknown,
She planted Capri's couchant lion to defend her.

VII

A mother kind, she doth but tantalize:
Nor from her secret gardens will she spurn us.
The Roman, casting hitherward his eyes,
Forgot his Sybaris beside Volturnus —
Forgot the streams and sylvan charms
That decked his Sabine farms,
And orchards on the slopes that sink to still Avernus.

VIII

Here was his substance wasted: here he lost
The marrow that subdued the world, in leisure;
Counting no days that were not feasts, no cost
Too dear to purchase finer forms of pleasure;
Yet, while for him stood still the sun,
The restless world rolled on,
And shook from off its skirts Cæsar and Cæsar's treasure.

IX

Less than he sought will we: a moon of peace,
To feed the mind on Fancy's airy diet;
Soft airs that come like memories of Greece,
Nights that renew the old Phœnician quiet:
Escape from yonder burning crest
That stirs with new unrest,
And in its lava-streams keeps hot the endless riot.

X

Here, from the wars of Gaul, the strife of Rome,
May we, meek citizens, a summer screen us:
Here find with milder Earth a perfect home,
Once, ere she puts profounder rest between us:
Here break the sacred laurel bough
Still for Apollo's brow,
And bind the myrtle buds to crown a purer Venus.

1868.

IN MY VINEYARD

I

At last the dream that clad the field
Is fairest fact, and stable;
At last my vines a covert yield,
A patch for song and fable.
I thread the rustling ranks, that hide
Their misty violet treasure,
And part the sprays with more than pride,
And more than owner's pleasure.

II

The tender shoots, the fragrance fine,
Betray the garden's poet,
Whose daintiest life is turned to wine,
Yet half is shy to show it, —
The epicure, who yields to toil
A scarce fulfilled reliance,
But takes from sun and dew and soil
A grace unguessed by science.

III

Faint odors, from the bunches blown,
Surround me and subdue me;
The vineyard-breath of many a zone
Is softly breathing through me:
From slopes of Eshkol, in the sun,
And many a hillside classic:
From where Falernian juices run,
And where they press the Massic!

IV

Where airy terraces, on high,
The hungry vats replenish,
And, less from earth than from the sky,
Distil the golden Rhenish:
Where, light of heart, the Bordelais
Compels his stony level
To burst and foam in purple spray, —
The rose that crowns the revel!

V

So here, as there, the subject earth
Shall take a tenderer duty;
And Labor walk with harmless Mirth,
And wed with loving Beauty:
So here, a gracious life shall fix
Its seat, in sunnier weather;
For sap and blood so sweetly mix,
And richly run together!

VI

The vine was exiled from the land
That bore but needful burdens;

But now we slack the weary hand,
And look for gentler guerdons:
We take from Ease a grace above
The strength we took from Labor,
And win to laugh, and woo to love,
Each grimly-earnest neighbor.

VII

What idle dreams! Even as I muse,
I feel a falling shadow;
And vapors blur and clouds confuse
My coming Eldorado.
Portentous, grim, a ghost draws nigh,
To clip my flying fancy,
And change the shows of earth and sky
With evil necromancy.

VIII

The leaves on every vine-branch curl
As if a frost had stung them;
The bunches shrivel, snap, and whirl
As if a tempest flung them;
And as the ghost his forehead shakes,
Denying and commanding,
But withered stalks and barren stakes
Surround me where I'm standing.

IX

"Beware!" the spectre cried, "the woe
Of this delusive culture!
The nightingale that lures thee so
Shall hatch a ravening vulture.
To feed the vat, to fill the bin,
Thou pluck'st the vineyard's foison,
That drugs the cup of mirth with sin,
The veins of health with poison!"

X

But now a golden mist was born,
With violet odors mingled:
I felt a brightness, as of morn,
And all my pulses tingled;
And forms arose, — among them first
The old Ionian lion,
And they, Sicilian Muses nursed, —
Theocritus and Bion.

XI

And he of Teos, he of Rome,
The Sabine bard and urban;
And Saadi, from his Persian home,
And Hafiz in his turban:
And Shakespeare, silent, sweet, and grave,
And Herrick with his lawns on;
And Luther, mellow, burly, brave,
Along with Rare Ben Jonson!

XII

"Be comforted!" they seemed to say;
"For Nature does no treasons:
She neither gives nor takes away
Without eternal reasons.
She heaps the stores of corn and oil
In such a liberal measure,
That, past the utmost need of Toil,
There 's something left for Pleasure.

XIII

"The secret soul of sun and dew
Not vainly she distilleth,
And from these globes of pink and blue
A harmless cup she filleth:
Who loveth her may take delight
In what for him she dresses,
Nor find in cheerful appetite
The portal to excesses.

XIV

"Yes, ever since the race began
To press the vineyard's juices,
It was the brute within the man
Defiled their nobler uses;
But they who take from order joy,
And make denial duty,
Provoke the brute they should destroy
By Freedom and by Beauty!"

XV

They spake; and lo! the baleful shape
Grew dim, and then retreated;
And bending o'er the hoarded grape,
The vines my vision greeted.
The sunshine burst, the breezes turned
The leaves till they were hoary,
And over all the vineyard burned
A fresher light of glory!

1869.

THE TWO GREETINGS

I. — Salve!

Scarce from the void of shadows taken,
We hail thine opening eyelids, boy!
Be welcome to the world! Awaken
To strength and beauty, and to joy!

Within those orbs of empty wonder
Let life its starry fires increase,
And curve those tender lips asunder
With faintest smiles of baby peace.

Sealed in their buds, the beauteous senses
Shall gladden thee as they unfold:
With soft allurements, stern defences,
Thy riper being they shall mould.

Far-eyed desires and hopes unbounded
Within thy narrow nest are furled:
Behold, for thee how fair is rounded
The circle of the sunlit world!

The oceans and the winds invite thee,
The peopled lands thy coming wait:
No wreck nor storm shall long affright thee,
For all are parts of thine estate.

Advance to every triumph wrested
By plough and pencil, pen and sword,
For, with thy robes of action vested,
Though slaves be others, thou art lord!

Thy breath be love, thy growth be duty,
To end in peace as they began:
Pre-human in thy helpless beauty,
Become more beautiful, as Man!

II.—Vale!

Now fold thy rich experience round thee,
To shield therewith the sinking heart:
The sunset-gold of Day hath crowned thee:
The dark gate opens, — so depart!

What growth the leafy years could render
No more into its bud returns;
It clothes thee still with faded splendor
As banks are clothed by autumn ferns.

All spring could dream or summer fashion,
If ripened, or untimely cast,
The harvest of thy toil and passion —
Thy sheaf of life — is bound at last.

What scattered ears thy field encloses,
What tares unweeded, now behold;
And here the poppies, there the roses,
Send withered fragrance through the gold.

Lo! as thou camest, so thou goest,
From bright Unknown to bright Unknown,
Save that the light thou forward throwest,
Was fainter then behind thee thrown.

Again be glad! through tears and laughter,
And deed and failure, thou art strong:
Thy Here presages thy Hereafter,
And neither sphere shall do thee wrong!

To mother-breasts of nurture fonder
Go, child! — once more in beauty young:
And hear our *Vale!* echoed yonder
As *Salve!* in a sweeter tongue!

1869.

SHEKH AHNAF'S LETTER FROM BAGHDAD

In Allah's name, the Ever Merciful,
The Most Compassionate! To thee, my friend,
Ben-Arif, peace and blessing! May this scroll,
A favored herald, tell thee in Tangier
That Ahnaf follows soon, if Allah wills!
Yes, after that last day at Arafât
Whereof I wrote thee, — after weary moons,
Delayed among the treacherous Wahabees, —
The long, sweet rest beneath Derreych's palms,
That cooled my body for the burning bath
Of naked valleys in the hither waste
Beside Euphrates, — now behold me here

In Baghdad! Here, and drinking from the well
Whose first pure waters fertilized the West!

I, as thou knowest, with both my hands took hold
Of Law and of Tradition, so to lift
To knowledge and obedience my soul.
Severe was I accounted — but my strength
Was likewise known of all men; and I craved
The sterner discipline which Islam first
Endured, and knit the sinews of our race.
What says the Law? — "Who changes or perverts,
Conceals, rejects, or holds of small account,
Though it were but the slightest seeming word,
Hath *all* concealed, perverted, slighted!" This,
Thou knowest, I held, and hold. Here, I hoped,
The rigid test should gladden limbs prepared
To bend, accept, and then triumphant rise.
Even as the weak of faith rejoice to find
Some lax interpretation, I rejoiced
In foretaste of the sure severity.
As near I drew, across the sandy flats,
Above the palms the yellow minaret
Wrote on the sky my welcome: "Ahnaf, hail!
Here, in the city of the Abbasid,
Set thou thine evening by its morning star
Of Faith, and bind the equal East and West!"

Ah me, Ben-Arif! how shall pen of mine
Set forth the perturbation of the soul?
To doubt were death; not hope, were much the same
As not believe — but Allah tries my strength
With tests far other than severest law.
When I had bathed, and then had cleansed with prayer
My worn and dusty soul, (so, doubly pure,
Pronounced the *fathah* as 't is heard in Heaven),
I sought the court-yard of Almansour's mosque,
Where, after *asser*, creeping shadows cool
The marble, and the shekhs in commerce grave
Keep fresh the ancient wisdom. Me they gave
Reception kindly, though perchance I felt —
Or fancied, only — lack of special warmth
For vows accomplished and my pilgrim zeal.
"Where is Tangier?" said one; whereat the rest
With most indifferent knowledge did discuss
The problem — none, had they but questioned me! —
Then snatched again the theme they half let drop,
And in their heat forgot me.

I, abashed,
Sat listening: vainly did I prick mine ears.
I knew the words, indeed, but missed therein
The wonted sense: they stripped our Holy Book
Of every verse which not contains the Law, —
Spake Justice and Forgiveness, Peace and Love,
Nor once the duties of the right hand fixed,
Nor service of the left: the nature they
Of Allah glorified, and not His names:
Of customs and observances no word
Their lips let fall: and I distinguished not,
Save by their turbans, that they other were
Than Jews, or Christians, or the Pagans damned.
Methought I dreamed; and in my mind withdrawn
At last heard only the commingling clash
Of voices near me, and the songs outside

Of boatmen on the Tigris. Then a hand
Came on my shoulder, and the oldest shekh,
White-bearded Hatem, spake: "O Ahnaf! thou
Art here a stranger, and it scarce beseems
That we should speak of weighty matters thus
To uninstructed ears — the less, to thine,
Which, filled so long with idle sand, require
The fresh delight of sympathetic speech
That cools like yonder fountain, and makes glad.
Nor wouldst thou hear, perchance, nor could we give
An easy phrase as key to what so long
Hath here been forged: but come to-night with me
Where this shall be applied, and more, to bring
Islam a better triumph than the sword
Of Ali gave; for that but slew the foe,
This maketh him a friend."

I, glad at heart
To know my hope not false, yet wondering much,
Gave eager promise, and at nightfall went
With Hatem to the college of a sect
We know not in the West — nor is there need:
An ancient hall beneath a vaulted dome,
With hanging lamps well lit, and cushioned seats
Where sat a grave and motley multitude.
When they beheld my guide, they all arose,
And "Peace be with thee, Hatem!" greeting, cried.
He, whispering to me: "O Ahnaf, sit
And hear, be patient, wonder if thou wilt,
But keep thy questions sagely to the end,
When I shall seek thee" — to a dais passed,
And sat him down. And all were silent there
In decent order, or in whispers spoke;
But great my marvel was when I beheld
Parsee and Jew and Christian — yea, the race
Of Boodh and Brahma — with the Faithful mixed
As if 't were no defilement! Lo! they rose
Again, with equal honor to salute
The Rabbi Daood, Jewest of the Jews, —
And even so, for an Armenian priest!
Yet both some elder prophets share with us,
And it might pass: but twice again they rose, —
Once for a Parsee, tinged like smoky milk,
His hat a leaning tower, — and once, a dark,
Grave man, with turban thinner than a wheel,
A wafer on his forehead (Satan's sign!) —
A worshipper of Ganges and the cow!
These made my knees to smite: yet Hatem stood
And gave his hand, and they beside him sat.

Then one by one made speech; and what the first,
The shrill-tongued Rabbi, claimed as rule for all,
That they accepted. "Forasmuch," (said he)
"As either of our sects hath special lore
Which not concerns the others — special signs
And marvels which the others must reject,
However holy and attested deemed,
Set we all such aside, and hold our minds
Alone to that which in our creeds hath power
To move, enlighten, strengthen, purify, —
The God behind the veil of miracles!
So speak we to the common brain of each
And to the common heart; for what of Truth
Grows one with life, is manifest to all,

Or Jew, or Moslem, or whatever name,
And none deny it: test we then how much
This creed or that hath power to shape true lives."
All there these words applauded: Hatem most,
Who spake: "My acquiescence lies therein,
That on thy truth, O Jew! I build the claim
Of him, our Prophet, to authority."
Then some one near me, jeering, said: "Well done!
He gives up Gabriel and the Beast Borâk!"
"Yea, but" — another answered — "must the Jew
Not also lose his Pharaohs and his plagues,
His rams'-horns and his Joshua and the sun?"
"For once the Christians," whispered back a Jew,
"Must cease to turn their water into wine,
Or feed the multitude with five small loaves
And two small fishes." Thus the people talked;
While I, as one that in a dream appears
To eat the flesh of swine, and cannot help
The loathsome dream, awaited what should come.

To me it seemed — and doubtless to the rest,
Though heretics and pagans — as the chiefs
Who there disputed were both maimed and bound,
So little dared they offer, shorn and lopped
Of all their vigor, false as well as true.
Was it of Islam that Shekh Hatem spake,
With ringing tongue and fiery words that forced
Unwilling tears from Pagan and from Jew,
And cries of "*Allah Akhbar!*" from his own?
Forsooth, I know not: he was Islam's chief.
How dared he nod his head and smile, to hear
The Jew declare his faith in God the Lord,
The Christian preach of love and sacrifice,
The Parsee and the Hindoo recognize
The gifts of charity and temperance,
And peace and purity? If this be so,
And heretic and pagan crowd with us
The gates of Allah's perfect Paradise,
Why hath He sent His Prophet? Nay, — I write
In anger, not in doubt: nor need I here
To thee, Ben-Arif, faithful man and wise,
Portray the features of my shame and grief.

Ere all had fully spoken, I, confused, —
Hearing no word of washing or of prayer,
Of cross, or ark, or fire, or symbol else
Idolatrous, obscene, — could only guess
What creed was glorified before the crowd,
By garb and accent of the chief who spake:
And scarcely then; for oft, as one set forth
His holiest duties, all, as with one voice,
Exclaimed: "But also these are mine!" The strife
Was then, how potent were they, how observed, —
Made manifest in life? One cannot say
That such are needless, but their sacred stamp
Comes from observance of all forms of law,
Which here — the strength of Islam — was suppressed.
Their wrangling — scarcely could it so be called! —
Was o'er the husks: the kernel of the creed
They first picked out, and flung it to the winds.

I, pierced on every side with sorest stings,
Waited uneasily the end delayed,

When Hatem spake once more: his eye was bright,
And the long beard that o'er his girdle rolled
Shook as in storm. "Now, God be praised!" he cried:
"God ever merciful, compassionate,
Hath many children; these have many tongues:
But of one blood are they, one truth they seek,
One law of Love and Justice fits them all.
And they have many Prophets: may it be,
Though not of like commission, in so far
As they declare His truth, they speak for Him!
Go past their histories: accept their souls,
And whatsoe'er of perfect and of pure
Is breathed from each, in each and all the same,
Confirms the others' office and its own!
Here is the centre of the moving wheel, —
The point of rest, wherefrom the separate creeds
Build out their spokes, that seem to chase and flee,
Revolving in the marches of His Day!
If one be weak, destroy it: if it bear
Unstrained His glory of Eternal Truth,
And firmer fibre from the ages gain,
Behold, at last it shall replace the rest!
Even as He wills! The bright solution grows
Nearer and clearer with the whirling years:
Till finally the use of outward signs
Shall be outworn, the crumbling walls thrown down,
And one Religion shall make glad the world!"

More I could not endure: I did not wait
For Hatem's coming, as he promised me;
Yet — ere amid the crowds I could escape —
I saw the Rabbi and the Christian priest
Fall on his neck with weeping. With a groan,
A horrid sense of smothering in my throat,
And words I will not write, I gained the air,
And saw, O Prophet! how thy Crescent shone
Above the feathery palm-tops, and the dome
Of Haroun's tomb upon the Tigris' bank.
And this is Baghdad! — Eblis, rather say! —
O fallen city of the Abbasid,
Where Islam is defiled, and by its sons!
Prepare, Ben-Arif, to receive thy friend,
Who with the coming moon shall westward turn
To keep his faith undarkened in Tangier!

1869.

NAPOLEON AT GOTHA

I

We walk amid the currents of actions left undone,
The germs of deeds that wither, before they see the sun.
For every sentence uttered, a million more are dumb:
Men's lives are chains of chances, and History their sum.

II

Not he, the Syracusan, but each impurpled lord
Must eat his banquet under the hair-suspended sword;
And one swift breath of silence may fix or change the fate
Of him whose force is building the fabric of a state.

III

Where o'er the windy uplands the slated turrets shine,
Duke August ruled at Gotha, in Castle Friedenstein, —
A handsome prince and courtly, of light and shallow heart,
No better than he should be, but with a taste for Art.

IV

The fight was fought at Jena, eclipsed was Prussia's sun,
And by the French invaders the land was overrun ;
But while the German people were silent in despair,
Duke August painted pictures, and curled his yellow hair.

V

Now, when at Erfurt gathered the ruling royal clan,
Themselves the humble subjects, their lord the Corsican,
Each bade to ball and banquet the sparer of his line :
Duke August with the others, to Castle Friedenstein.

VI

Then were the larders rummaged, the forest-stags were slain,
The tuns of oldest vintage showered out their golden rain ;
The towers were bright with banners, — but all the people said :
"We, slaves, must feed our master, — would God that he were dead ! "

VII

They drilled the ducal guardsmen, men young and straight and tall,
To form a double column, from gate to castle-wall ;
And as there were but fifty, the first must wheel away,
Fall in beyond the others, and lengthen the array.

VIII

"*Parbleu !*" Napoleon muttered: "Your Highness' guards I prize,
So young and strong and handsome, and all of equal size."
"You, Sire," replied Duke August, "may have as fine, if you
Will twice or thrice repeat them, as I am forced to do ! "

IX

Now, in the Castle household, of all the folk, was one
Whose heart was hot within him, the Ducal Huntsman's son ;
A proud and bright-eyed stripling ; scarce fifteen years he had,
But free of hall and chamber : Duke August loved the lad.

X

He saw the forceful homage: he heard the shouts that came
From base throats, or unwilling, but equally of shame:
He thought: "*One* man has done it, — *one* life would free the land,
But all are slaves and cowards, and none will lift a hand !

XI

"My grandsire hugged a bear to death, when broke his hunting-spear,
And has this little Frenchman a muzzle I should fear ?
If kings are cowed, and princes, and all the land is scared,
Perhaps a boy can show them the thing they might have dared ! "

XII

Napoleon on the morrow was coming once again,
(And all the castle knew it) without his courtly train;
And, when the stairs were mounted, there was no other road
But one long, lonely passage, to where the Duke abode.

XIII

None guessed the secret purpose the silent stripling kept:
Deep in the night he waited, and, when his father slept,
Took from the rack of weapons a musket old and tried,
And cleaned the lock and barrel, and laid it at his side.

XIV

He held it fast in slumber, he lifted it in dreams
Of sunlit mountain-forests and stainless mountain-streams;
And in the morn he loaded — the load was bullets three:
"For Deutschland — for Duke August — and now the third for me!"

XV

"What! ever wilt be hunting?" the stately Marshal cried;
"I'll fetch a stag of twenty!" the pale-faced boy replied,
As, clad in forest color, he sauntered through the court,
And said, when none could hear him: "Now, may the time be short!"

XVI

The corridor was vacant, the windows full of sun;
He stole within the midmost, and primed afresh his gun;
Then stood, with all his senses alert in ear and eye
To catch the lightest signal that showed the Emperor nigh.

XVII

A sound of wheels: a silence: the muffled sudden jar
Of guards their arms presenting: a footstep mounting far,
Then nearer, briskly nearer, — a footstep, and alone!
And at the farther portal appeared Napoleon!

XVIII

Alone, his hands behind him, his firm and massive head
With brooded plans uplifted, he came with measured tread:
And yet, those feet had shaken the nations from their poise,
And yet, that will to shake them depended on the boy's!

XIX

With finger on the trigger, the gun held hunter-wise,
His rapid heart-beats sending the blood to brain and eyes,
The boy stood, firm and deadly, — another moment's space,
And then the Emperor saw him, and halted, face to face.

XX

A mouth as cut in marble, an eye that pierced and stung
As might a god's, all-seeing, the soul of one so young:
A look that read his secret, that lamed his callow will,
That inly smiled, and dared him his purpose to fulfil!

XXI

As one a serpent trances, the boy, forgetting all,
Felt but that face, nor noted the harmless musket's fall;
Nor breathed, nor thought, nor trembled; but, pale and cold as stone,
Saw pass, nor look behind him, the calm Napoleon.

XXII

And these two kept their secret; but from that day began
The sense of fate and duty that made the boy a man;
And long he lived to tell it, — and, better, lived to say:
"God's purposes were grander: He thrust me from His way!"

1869.

THE ACCOLADE

I

Under the lamp in the tavern yard
The beggars and thieves were met;
Ruins of lives that were evil-starred,
Battered bodies and faces hard,
A loveless and lawless set.

II

The cans were full, if the scrip was lean;
A fiddler played to the crowd
The high-pitched lilt of a tune obscene,
When there entered the gate, in garments mean,
A stranger tall and proud.

III

There was danger in their doubting eyes;
"Now who are you?" they said.
"One who has been more wild than wise,
Who has played with force and fed on lies,
As you on your mouldy bread.

IV

"The false have come to me, high and low,
Where I only sought the true:
I am sick of sham and sated with show;
The honest evil I fain would know,
In the license here with you."

V

"He shall go!" "He shall stay!" In hot debate
Their whims and humors ran,
When Jack o' the Strong Arm square and straight
Stood up, like a man whose word is fate,
A reckless and resolute man.

VI

"Why brawl," said he, "at so slight a thing?
Are fifty afraid of one?
We have taken a stranger into our ring
Ere this, and made him in sport our king;
So let it to-night be done!

VII

"Fetch him a crown of tinsel bright,
For sceptre a tough oak-staff;
And who most serves to the King's delight,
The King shall dub him his own true knight,
And I swear the King shall laugh!"

VIII

They brought him a monstrous tinsel crown,
They put the staff in his hand;
There was wrestling and racing up and down,
There was song of singer and jest of clown,
There was strength and sleight-of-hand.

IX

The King, he pledged them with clink of can,
He laughed with a royal glee;
There was dull mistrust when the sports began,

There was roaring mirth when the rearmost man
Gave out, and the ring was free.

X

For Jack o' the Strong Arm strove with a will,
With the wit and the strength of four;
There was never a part he dared not fill,
Wrestler, and singer, and clown, until
The motley struggle was o'er.

XI

And ever he turned from the deft surprise,
And ever from strain or thrust,
With a dumb appeal in his laughing guise,
And gazed on the King with wistful eyes,
Panting, and rough with dust.

XII

"Kneel, Jack o' the Strong Arm! Our delight
Hath most been due to thee,"
Said the King, and stretched his rapier bright:
"Rise, Sir John Armstrong, our true knight,
Bold, fortunate, and free!"

XIII

Jack o' the Strong Arm knelt and bowed,
To meet the christening blade;
He heard the shouts of the careless crowd,
And murmured something, as though he vowed,
When he felt the accolade.

XIV

He kissed the King's hand tenderly,
Full slowly then did rise,
And within him a passion seemed to be;
For his choking throat they all could see,
And the strange tears in his eyes.

XV

From his massive breast the rags he threw,
He threw them from body and limb,
Till, bare as a new-born babe to view,
He faced them, no longer the man they knew:
They silently stared at him.

XVI

"O King!" he said, "thou wert King, I knew;
I am verily knight, O King!
What thou hast done thou canst not undo;
Thou hast come to the false and found the true
In the carelessly ventured thing.

XVII

"As I cast away these rags I have worn,
The life that was in them I cast;
Take me, naked and newly born,
Test me with power and pride and scorn,
I shall be true to the last!"

XVIII

His large, clear eyes were weak as he spoke,
But his mouth was firm and strong;
And a cry from the thieves and beggars broke,
As the King took off his own wide cloak
And covered him from the throng.

XIX

He gave him his royal hand in their sight,
And he said, before the ring:
"Come with me, Sir John! Be leal and right;
If I have made thee all of a knight,
Thou hast made me more of a king!"

1871.

ERIC AND AXEL

I

Though they never divided my meat or wine,
Yet Eric and Axel are friends of mine;
Never shared my sorrow, nor laughed with my glee,
Yet Eric and Axel are dear to me;

And faithfuller comrades no man ever knew
Than Eric and Axel, the fearless, the true!

II

When I hit the target, they feel no pride;
When I spin with the waltzers, they wait outside;
When the holly of Yule-tide hangs in the hall,
And kisses are freest, they care not at all;
When I sing, they are silent; I speak, they obey,
Eric and Axel, my hope and my stay!

III

They wait for my coming; they know I shall come,
When the dancers are faint and the fiddlers numb,
With a shout of "Ho, Eric!" and "Axel, ho!"
As we skim the wastes of the Norrland snow,
And their frozen breath to a silvery gray
Turns Eric's raven and Axel's bay.

IV

By the bondehus and the herregoard,
O'er the glassy pavement of frith and fiord,
Through the tall fir-woods, that like steel are drawn
On the broadening red of the rising dawn,
Till one low roof, where the hills unfold,
Shelters us all from the angry cold.

V

I tell them the secret none else shall hear;
I love her, Eric, I love my dear!
I love her, Axel; wilt love her, too,
Though her eyes are dark and mine are blue?
She has eyes like yours, so dark and clear:
Eric and Axel will love my dear!

VI

They would speak if they could; but I think they know
Where, when the moon is thin, they shall go,
To wait awhile in the sleeping street,
To hasten away upon snow-shod feet, —
Away and away, ere the morning star
Touches the tops of the spires of Calmàr!

VII

Per, the merchant, may lay at her feet
His Malaga wine and his raisins sweet,
Brought in his ships from Portugal land,
And I am as bare as the palm of my hand;
But she sighs for me, and she sighs for you,
Eric and Axel, my comrades true!

VIII

You care not, Eric, for gold and wine;
You care not, Axel, for show and shine;
But you care for the touch of the hand that 's dear,
And the voice that fondles you through the ear,
And you shall save us, through storm and snow,
When *she* calls: "Ho, Eric!" and "Axel, ho!"

1871.

THE PICTURE OF ST. JOHN

EDITOR'S NOTE

Although "The Picture of St. John" was published in 1866, the conception of the poem dates from a much earlier period. The writing of it was begun in 1850; four years later, however, it had advanced but very little. Then it rested altogether, until in 1863 it presented itself once more, and in a matured shape, to the poet's mind. During the latter year and the two following work on it continued more or less steadily, and when in the late summer of 1865 the last stanza was penned, the author turned again to the beginning, and re-wrote that part of the poem which owed its origin to the earliest time.

In 1880, when, after the poet's death, "The Picture of St. John" was included in the Household Edition, a number of stanzas here and there (forty-seven of them in all) were omitted for the first time. This was done in accordance with the author's intention, as marked by himself in his own copy of the published poem.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In regard to the subject of this poem I have nothing to say. It grew naturally out of certain developments in my own mind; and the story, unsuggested by any legend or detached incident whatever, shaped itself to suit the theme. The work of time, written only as its own necessity prompted, and finished with the care and conscience which such a venture demands, I surrender it to the judgment of the reader.

The form of the stanza which I have adopted, however, requires a word of explanation. I have endeavored to strike a middle course between the almost inevitable monotony of an unvarying stanza, in a poem of this length, and the loose character which the heroic measure assumes when arbitrarily rhymed, without the check of regularly recurring divisions. It seemed to me that this object might be best accomplished by adhering rigidly to the measure and limit of the stanza, yet allowing myself freedom of rhyme within that limit. The *ottava rima* is undoubtedly better adapted for the purposes of a romantic epic than either the Spenserian stanza or the heroic couplet; but it needs the element of humor (as in Byron's "Don Juan") to relieve its uniform sweetness. On the other hand, the proper compactness and strength of rhythm can with difficulty be preserved in a poem where all form of stanza is discarded. My aim has been, as far as possible, to combine the advantages and lessen the objections of both.

I know of but one instance in which the experiment has been even partially tried, — the "Oberon" of Wieland, wherein the rhymes are wilfully varied, and sometimes the measure, the stanza almost invariably closing with an Alexandrine. In the present case, I have been unable to detect any prohibitory rule in the genius of our language; and the only doubt which suggested itself to my mind was that the ear, becoming swiftly accustomed to the arrangement of rhyme in one stanza, might expect to find it reproduced in the next. I believe, however, that such disappointment, if it should now and then occur, will be very transitory, — that even an unusually delicate ear will soon adjust itself to the changing order, and find that the varied harmony at which I have aimed (imperfectly as I may have succeeded) compensates for the lack of regularity. At times, I confess, the temptation to close with an Alexandrine was very great; but it was necessary to balance the one apparent license by a rigid adherence to the customary form in all other respects. Hence, also, I have endeavored, as frequently as possible, to use but three rhymes in a stanza, in order to strengthen my experiment with an increased effect of melody. I have found, since the completion of the poem, that it contains more than seventy variations in the order of rhyme, not all of which, of course, can be pronounced equally agreeable: nor does this freedom involve less labor than a single form of stanza, because the variations must be so arranged as to relieve and support each other. My object has been, not to escape the laws which Poetry imposes, but to select a form which gives greater appearance of unrestrained movement, and more readily reflects the varying moods of the poem.

PROEM

TO THE ARTISTS

I

Because no other dream my childhood knew
Than your bright Goddess sends, — that earliest
Her face I saw, and from her bounteous breast,
All others dry, the earliest nurture drew;
And since the hope, so lovely, was not true,
To write my life in colors, — win a place
Among your ranks, though humble, yet with grace
That might accord me brotherhood with you:

II

Because the dream, thus cherished, gave my life
Its first faint sense of beauty, and became.
Even when the growing years to other strife
Led forth my feet, a shy, secluded flame:
And ye received me, when our pathways met,
As one long parted, but of kindred fate;
And in one heaven our kindred stars are set;
To you, my Brethren, this be dedicate!

III

And though some sportive nymph the channel turned,
And led to other fields mine infant rill,
The sense of fancied destination still
Leaps in its waves, and will not be unlearned.
I charge not Fate with having done me wrong;
Much hath she granted, though so much was spurned;
But leave the keys of Color, silent long,
And pour my being through the stops of Song!

IV

Even as one breath the organ-pipe compels
To yield that note which through the minster swells
In chorded thunder, and the hollow lyre
Beneath its gentler touches to awake
The airy monotones that fan desire,
And thrills the fife with blood of battle, — so
Our natures from one source their music take,
And side by side to one far Beauty flow!

V

And I have measured, in fraternal pride,
Your reverence, your faith, your patient power
Of stern self-abnegation; and have tried
The range between your brightest, darkest hour,

The path of chill neglect, and that so fair
With praise upspringing like a wind-sown flower:
But, whether thorns or amaranths ye wear,
Your speech is mine, your sacrifice, your prayer!

VI

Permit me, therefore, ye who nearest stand,
Among the worthiest, and kindliest known
In contact of our lives, to take the hand
Whose grasp assures me I am not alone;
For thus companioned, I shall find the tone
Of flowing song, and all my breath command.
Your names I veil from those who should not see,
Not from yourselves, my Friends, and not from me!

VII

You, underneath whose brush the autumn day
Draws near the sunset which it never finds, —
Whose art the smoke of Indian Summer binds
Beyond the west-wind's power to breathe away:
Who fix the breakers in their gifted grace
And stretch the sea-horizon, dim and gray,
I'll call you OPAL, — so your tints enchase
The pearly atmospheres wherein they play.

VIII

And you, who love the brown October field,
The lingering leaves that flutter as they cling,
And each forlorn but ever-lovely thing, —
To whom elegiac Autumn hath revealed
Her sweetest dirges, BLOODSTONE: for the hue
Of sombre meadows to your palette cleaves,
And lowering skies, with sunlight breaking through,
And flecks of crimson on the scattered leaves!

IX

You, TOPAZ, clasp the full-blown opulence
Of Summer: many a misty mountain-range
Or smoky valley, specked with warrior-tents,
Basks on your canvas: then, with grander change,
We climb to where your mountain twilight gleams
In spectral pomp, or nurse the easeful sense
Which through your Golden Day forever dreams
By lakes and sunny hills, and falling streams.

X

You banish color from your cheerful cell,
O PAROS! but a stern imperial form
Stands in the marble moonlight where you dwell,
A Poet's head, with grand Ionian beard,
And Phidian dreams, that shine against the storm
Of toilful life, the white robe o'er them cast
Of breathless Beauty: yours the art, endeared
To men and gods, first born, enduring last.

XI

You, too, whom how to name I may not guess,
Except the jacinth and the ruby, blent,
The native warmth of life might represent,
Which, drawn from barns and homesteads, you express,
Or vintage revels, round the maple-tree;
Or when the dusky race you quaintly dress
In art that gives them finer liberty, —
Made by your pencil, ere by battle, free!

XII

Where'er my feet have strayed, whatever shore
I visit, there your venturous footprints cling.
From Chimborazo unto Labrador
One sweeps the Continent with eagle wing,
To dip his brush in tropic noon, or fires
Of Arctic night; one sets his seal upon
Far Colorado's cleft, colossal spires,
And lone, snow-kindled cones of Oregon!

XIII

Another through the mystic moonlight floats
That silvers Venice; and another sees
The blazoned galleys and the gilded boats
Bring home her Doges: Andalusian leas,
Gray olive-slopes, and mountains sun-embrowned
Entice another, and from ruder ground
Of old Westphalian homes another brings
Enchanted memories of the meanest things.

XIV

To each and all, the hand of fellowship!
A poet's homage (should that title fall
From other lips than mine) to each and all!
For, whether this pale star of Song shall dip
To swift forgetfulness, or burn beside
Accepted lamps of Art's high festival,
Its flame was kindled at our shrines allied,
In double faith, and from a twofold call!

August 30, 1865.

THE PICTURE OF ST. JOHN

BOOK I

THE ARTIST

I

COMPLETE the altar stands: my task is done.
Awhile from sacred toil and silent prayer
I rest, and never shone the vale so fair
As now, beneath the mellow autumn sun,
And overbreathed by tinted autumn air!
In drowsy murmurs slide the mountain rills,
And, save of light, the whole wide heaven is bare
Above the happy slumber of the hills.

II

Here, as a traveller whose feet have clomb
A weary mountain-slope, may choose his seat,
And resting, track the ways that he hath come, —
The broken landscapes, level far below,
The turf that kissed, the flints that tore his feet,
And each dim speck that once was bliss or woe, —
I breathe a space, between two sundered lives,
And view what now is ended, what survives.

III

Such as I am, I am: in soul and sense
Distinct, existing in my separate right,
And though a Power, beyond my clouded sight,
Spun from a thousand gathered filaments
My cord of life, within its inmost core
That life is mine: its torture, its delight,
Repeat not those that ever were before
Or ever shall be: mine are Day and Night.

IV

God gives to most an order which supplies
Their passive substance, and they move therein.
To some He grants the beating wings that rise
In endless aspiration, till they win
An awful vision of a deeper sin
And loftier virtue, other earth and skies:
And those their common help from each may draw,
But these must perish, save they find the law.

V

Vain to evade and useless to bewail
My fortune! One among the scattered few
Am I: by sharper lightning, sweeter dew
Refreshed or blasted, — on a wilder gale
Caught up and whirled aloft, till, hither borne,
My story pauses. Ere I drop the veil
Once let me take the Past in calm review,
Then eastward turn, and front the riper morn.

VI

What sire begat me, and what mother nursed,
What hills the blue frontiers of Earth I thought,
Or how my young ambition scaled them first,
It matters not: but I was finely wrought
Beyond their elements from whom I came.
A nimbler life informed mine infant frame:
The gauzy wings some Psyche-fancy taught
To flutter, soulless custom could not tame.

VII

Our state was humble, — yet above the dust,
If deep below the stars, — the state that feeds
Impatience, hinting yet denying needs,
And thus, on one side ever forward thrust
And on the other cruelly repressed,
My nature grew, — a wild-flower in the weeds, —
And hurt by ignorant love, that fain had blessed,
I sought some other bliss wherein to rest.

VIII

And, wandering forth, a child that could not know
The thing for which he pined, in sombre woods
And echo-haunted mountain-solitudes
I learned a rapture from the blended show
Of form and color, felt the soul that broods
In lonely scenes, the moods that come and go
O'er wayward Nature, making her the haunt
Of Art's forerunner, Love's eternal want.

IX

Long ere the growing instinct reached my hand,
It filled my brain: a pang of joy was born,
When, soft as dew, across the dewy land
Of Summer, leaned the crystal-hearted Morn;
And when the lessening day shone yellow-cold
On fallow glebe and stubble, I would stand
And feel a dumb despair its wings unfold,
And wring my hands, and weep as one forlorn.

X

At first in play, but soon with heat and stir
Of joy that hails discovered power, I tried
To mimic form, and taught mine eye to guide
The unskilled fingers. Praise became a spur
To overtake success, for in that vale
The simple people's wonder did not fail,
Nor vulgar prophecies, which yet confer
The first delicious thrills of faith and pride.

XI

So, as on shining pinions lifted o'er
The perilous bridge of boyhood, I advanced.
In warmer air the misty Mænads danced,
And Sirens sang on many a rising shore,
And Glory's handmaids beckoned me to choose
The freshest of the unworn wreaths they bore;
So gracious Fortune showed, so fair the hues
Wherewith she paints her cloud-built avenues!

XII

Ere up through all this airy ecstasy
The clamorous pulses of the senses beat,
And half the twofold man, maturing first,
Usurped its share of life, and bade me see
The ways of pleasure opening for my feet,
I stood alone: the tender breast that nursed,

The loins from whence I sprang, alike were cold,
And mine the humble roof, the scanty gold.

XIII

The pale, cold azure of my mountain sky
Became a darkness: Arber's head unshorn
No temple crowned, — not here could fame be born;
And, nor with gold nor knowledge weighted, I
Set forth, and o'er the green Bavarian land,
A happy wanderer, fared: the hour was nigh
When, in the home of Art, my feet should stand
Where Time and Power have kissed the Painter's hand!

XIV

Oh, sweet it was, when, from that bleak abode
Where avalanches grind the pines to dust,
And crouching glaciers down the hollows thrust
Their glittering claws, I took the sunward road,
Making my guide the torrent, that before
My steps ran shouting, giddy with its joy,
And tossed its white hands like a gamesome boy,
And sprayed its rainbow frolics o'er and o'er!

XV

Full-orbed, in rosy dusk, the perfect moon
That evening shone: the torrent's noise, afar,
No longer menaced, but with mellow tune
Sang to the twinkle of a silver star,
Above the opening valley. "Italy!"
The moon, the star, the torrent, said to me, —
"Sleep thou in peace, the morning will unbar
These Alpine gates, and give thy world to thee!"

XVI

And morning did unfold the jutting capes
Of chestnut-wooded hills, that held embayed
Warm coves of fruit, the pine's Æolian shade,
Or pillared bowers, blue with suspended grapes; —
A land whose forms some livelier grace betrayed;
Where motion sang and cheerful color laughed,
And only gloomed, amid the dancing shapes
Of vine and bough, the pointed cypress-shaft!

XVII

On, — on, through broadening vale and brightening sun
I walked, and hoary in their old repose
The olives twinkled: many a terrace rose,
With marbles crowned and jasmine overrun,
And orchards where the ivory silkworm spun.
On leafy palms outspread, its pulpy fruit
The fig-tree held; and last, the charm to close,
A dark-eyed shepherd piped a reedy flute.

XVIII

My heart beat loud: I walked as in a dream
Where simplest actions, touched with marvel, seem
Enchanted yet familiar: for I knew
The orchards, terraces, and breathing flowers.
The tree from Adam's garden, and the blue
Sweet sky behind the light aerial towers;
And that young faun that piped, had piped before, —
I knew my home: the exile now was o'er!

XIX

And when the third rich day declined his lids,
I floated where the emerald waters fold

Gem-gardens, fairy island-pyramids,
Whereon the orange hangs his globes of gold, —
Which aloes crown with white, colossal plume,
Above the beds where lavish Nature bids
Her sylphs of odor endless revel hold,
Her zones of flowers in balmy congress bloom!

XX

I hailed them all, and hailed beyond, the plain;
The palace-fronts, on distant hills uplift,
White as the morning-star; the streams that drift
In sandy channels to the Adrian main:
Till one still eve, with duplicated stain
Of crimson sky and wave, disclosed to me
The domes of Venice, anchored on the sea,
Far-off, — an airy city of the brain!

XXI

Forth from the shores of Earth we seemed to float,
Drawn by that vision, — hardly felt the breeze
That left one glassy ripple from the boat
To break the smoothness of the silken seas;
And far and near, as from the lucent air,
Came vesper chimes and wave-born melodies.
So might one die, if Death his soul could bear
So gently, Heaven before him float so fair!

XXII

This was the gate to Artists' Fairy-land.
The palpitating waters kissed the shores,
Gurgled in sparkling coils beneath the oars,
And lapped the marble stairs on either hand,
Summoning Beauty to her holiday:
While noiseless gondolas at palace-doors
Waited, and over all, in charmed delay,
San Marco's moon gazed from her golden stand!

XXIII

A silent city! where no clattering wheels
Jar the white pavement: cool the streets, and dumb,
Save for a million whispering waves, which come
To light their mellow darkness: where the peals
Of Trade's harsh clarions never vex the ear,
But the wide blue above, the green below,
Her pure Palladian palaces insphere, —
Piles, on whose steps the grass shall never grow!

XXIV

I sat within the courts of Veronese
And saw his figures breathe luxurious air,
And felt the sunshine of their lustrous hair.
Beneath the shade of Titian's awful trees
I stood, and watched the Martyr's brow grow cold:
Then came Giorgione, with his brush of gold,
To paint the dames that make his memory fair, —
The happy dames that never shall be old!

XXV

But most I lingered in that matchless hall
Where soars Madonna with adoring arms
Outspread, while deepening glories round her fall,
And every feature of her mortal charms
Becomes immortal, at the Father's call:
Beneath her, silver-shining cherubs fold
The clouds that bear her, slowly heavenward rolled:
The Sacred Mystery broodeth over all!

XXVI

And still, as one asleep, I turned away
To see the crimson of her mantle burn
In sunset clouds, the pearly deeps of day
Filled with cherubic faces, — ah, to spurn
My hopeless charts of pictures yet to be,
And feed the fancies of a swift despair,
Which mocked me from the azure arch of air,
And from the twinkling beryl of the sea!

XXVII

If this bright bloom were inaccessible
Which clad the world, and thus my senses stung,
How could I catch the mingled tints that clung
To cheek and throat, and softly downward fell
In poise of shoulders and the breathing swell
Of woman's bosom? How the life in eyes,
The glory on the loosened hair that lies,
The nameless music o'er her being flung?

XXVIII

Or how create anew the sterner grace
In man's heroic muscles sheathed or shown,
Whether he stoops from the immortal zone
Bare and majestic, god in limbs and face;
Or lies, a faun, beside his mountain flock;
Or clasps, a satyr, nymphs among the vine;
Or kneels, a hermit, in his cell of rock;
Or sees, a saint, his palms of glory shine!

XXIX

I took a fisher from the Lido's strand,
A youthful shape, by toil and vice unworn,
Upon his limbs a golden flush like morn,
And on his mellow cheek the roses tanned
Of health and joy. Perchance the soul I missed,
From mine exalted fancy might be born:
With eye upraised and locks by sunshine kissed,
I painted him as the Evangelist.

XXX

In vain! — the severance of his lips expressed
Kisses of love whereon his fancy fed,
And the warm tints each other sweetly wed
In slender limb and balanced arch of breast,
So keen with life, so marked in every line
With unideal nature, none had guessed
The dream that cheered me and the faith that led;
But human all I would have made divine!

XXXI

I found a girl before San Marco's shrine
Kneeling in gilded gloom: her tawny hair
Rippled across voluptuous shoulders bare,
And something in the altar-taper's shine
Sparkled like falling tears. This girl shall be
My sorrowing Magdalen, as guilty-sweet,
I said, as when, pure Christ! she knelt to thee,
And laid her blushing forehead on thy feet!

XXXII

She sat before me. Like a sunny brook
Poured the unbraided ripples softly round
The balmy dells, but left one snowy mound
Bare in its beauty: then I met her look, —
The conquering gaze of those bold eyes, which made,
Ah, God! the unrepented sin more fair

Than Magdalen kneeling with her humbled hair,
Or Agatha beneath the quæstor's blade!

XXXIII

What if my chaste ambition wavered then?
What if the veil from mine own nature fell
And I obeyed the old Circean spell,
And lived for living, not for painted men?
Youth follows Life, as bees the honey-bell,
And nightingales the northward march of Spring,
And once, a dazzled moth, must try his wing,
Though but to scorch it in the blaze of Hell!

XXXIV

Why only mimic what I might possess?
The cheated sense that revels in delight
Mocked at my long denial: touch and sight,
The warmth of wine, the sensuous loveliness
Of offered lips and bosoms breaking through
The parted bodice: winds whose faint caress
And wandering hands the daintiest dreams renew:
The sea's absorbing and embracing blue:

XXXV

Of these are woven our being's outward veil
Of rich sensation, which has power to part
The pure, untroubled soul and drunken heart, —
A screen of gossamer, but giants fail
The bright, enchanted web to rend in twain.
Two spirits dwell in us: one chaste and pale,
A still recluse, whose garments know no stain,
Whose patient lips are closed upon her pain:

XXXVI

The other bounding to her cymbal's clang,
A bold Bacchante, panting with the race
Of joy, the triumph and the swift embrace,
And gathering in one cup the grapes that hang
From every vine of Youth: around her head
The royal roses bare their hearts of red;
Music is on her lips, and from her face
Fierce freedom shines and wild, alluring grace!

XXXVII

Who shall declare that ever side by side
To weave harmonious fate these spirits wrought?
To whom came ever one's diviner pride
And one's full measure of delight, unsought?
Who dares the cells of blood enrich, exhaust,
Or trust his fortune unto either guide?—
So interbalanced hangs the equal cost
Of what is ordered and of what is taught!

XXXVIII

Surprised to Passion, my awakened life
Whirled onward in a warm, delirious maze,
At first reluctant, and with pangs of strife
That dashed their bitter o'er my honeyed days,
Until my soul's affrighted nun withdrew
And left me free: for light that other's chains
As garlands seemed, and fresh her wine as dew,
And wide her robes to hide the banquet-stains!

XXXIX

Those were the days of Summer which intrude
Their sultry fervor on the realm of Spring,

"TO SILENT VENICE IN HER CRYSTAL NEST" (Page 187)

And push its buds to sudden blossoming;
When earth and air, with panting love imbued,
O'erpower the subject life, and ceaseless dart
All round the warm horizon of the heart
Heat-lightnings in the sky of youth, which first
Regains its freshness when the bolts have burst.

XL

And thus, when that Sirocco's breath had passed,
A refluent wind of health swept o'er my brain,
Cold, swift, and searching: and before it fast
Fled the uncertain, misty shapes which cast
Their glory on my dreams. The ardor vain
That would have snatched, unearned, slow labor's crown,
Was dimmed; and half with courage, half with pain,
I guessed the path that led to old renown.

XLI

I turned my pictures, pitying the while
My boyish folly, for I could not yet
The dear deception of my youth forget,
And though it parted from me like an isle
Of the blue sea behind some rushing keel,
Still from the cliffs its temple seemed to smile,
Fairer in fading: future morns reveal
No bowers so bright as yesterdays conceal.

XLII

The laughing boys that on the marble piers
Lounge with their dangling feet above the wave;
The tawny faces of the gondoliers;
The low-browed girl, whose scarce-unfolded years
But half the lightning of her glances gave; —
I sketched in turn, with busy hand and brave,
And crushed my clouded hope's recurring pang,
And sweet "*Ti voglio bene assaï*" sang.

XLIII

Then came the hour when I must say farewell
To silent Venice in her crystal nest, —
When with the last peals of San Marco's bell
Her hushed and splendid pageant closed, and fell
Like her own jewel in the ocean's breast.
Belfry, and dome, and the superb array
Of wave-born temples floated far away,
And the dull shores received me in the west.

XLIV

And past the Euganæan hills, that break
The Adrian plain, I wandered to the Po,
And saw Ferrara, vacant in her woe,
Clasp the dim cell wherein her children take
A ghastly pride from her immortal shame;
And hailed Bologna, for Caracci's sake, —
The master bold, who scorned to court his fame,
But bared his arm and dipped his brush in flame.

XLV

Through many a dark-red dell of Apennine,
With chestnut-shadows in its brookless bed,
By flinty slopes whose only dew is wine,
And hills the olives gave a hoary head,
I climbed to seek the sunny vale where flows
The Tuscan river, — where, when Art was dead,
Lorenzo's spring thawed out the ages' snows,
And green with life the eternal plant arose!

XLVI

At last, from Pratolino's sloping crest,
I saw the far, aerial, purple gleam,
As from Earth's edge a fairer orb might seem
In softer air and sunnier beauty dressed,
And onward swift with panting bosom pressed,
Like one whose wavering will pursues a dream
And shrinks from waking; but the vision grew
With every step distinct in form and hue:

XLVII

Till on the brink of ancient Fiesolé,
Mute, breathless, hanging o'er the dazzling deeps
Of broad Val d'Arno, which the sinking day
Drowned in an airy bath of rosy ray, —
An atmosphere more dream-imbued than Sleep's, —
My feet were stayed; with sweet and sudden tears,
And startled lifting of the cloud that lay
Upon the landscape of the future years!

XLVIII

I leaned against a cypress-bole, afraid
With blind foretaste of coming ecstasy,
So rarely on the soul the joy to be
Prophetic dawns, so frequent falls the shade
Of near misfortune! All my senses sang,
And lark-like soared and jubilant and free
The flock of dreams, that from my bosom sprang,
O'er yonder towers to hover and to hang!

XLIX

Then, as the dusty road I downward paced,
A phantom arch was ever builded nigh
To span my coming, luminous and high;
And airy columns, crowned with censers, graced
The dreamful pomp, — with many a starry bell
From garlands woven in the fading sky,
And noiseless fountains shimmered, as they fell,
Like meteor-fires that haunt a fairy dell!

L

Two maids, upon a terrace that o'erhung
The highway, lightly strove in laughing play
Each one the other's wreath to snatch away,
With backward-bending heads, and arms that clung
In intertwining beauty. Both were young,
And one as my Madonna-dream was fair;
And she the garland from the other's hair
Caught with a cunning hand, and poised, and flung.

LI

A fragrant ring of jasmine flowers, it sped,
Dropping their elfin trumpets in its flight,
And downward circling, on my startled head
Some angel bade the diadem alight!
The cool green leaves and breathing blossoms white
Embraced my brow with dainty, mute caress:
I stood in rapt amazement, soul and sight
Surrendered to that vision's loveliness.

LII

She, too, stood, smitten with the wondrous chance
Whereby the freak of her unwitting hand
A stranger's forehead crowned. I saw her stand,
Most like some flying Hour, that, in her dance
Perceives a god, and drops her courser's rein:
Then, while I drank the fulness of her glance,

Crept over throat and cheek a bashful stain, —
She fled, yet flying turned, and looked again.

LIII

And I went forward, consecrated, blest,
And garlanded like some returning Faun
From Pan's green revels in the woodland's breast.
Here was a crown to give Ambition rest,
A wreath for infant Love to slumber on!
And blended, both in mine enchantment shone,
Till Love was only Fame familiar grown,
And Fame but Love triumphantly expressed!

LIV

Such moments come to all whom Art elects
To serve her, — Poet, Painter, Sculptor feel,
Once in their lives the shadows which conceal
Achievement lifted, and the world's neglects
Are spurned behind them, like the idle dust
Whirled from Hyperion's golden chariot-wheel:
Once vexing doubt is dumb, and long disgust
Allayed, and Time and Fate and Fame are just!

LV

It is enough, if underneath our rags
A single hour the monarch's purple shows.
In dearth of praise no true ambition flags,
And by his self-belief the student knows
The master: nor was ever wholly dark
The Artist's life. Though timid fortune lags
Behind his hope, there comes a day to mark
The late renown that round his name shall close.

LVI

I dared not question my prophetic pride,
But entered Florence as a conqueror,
To whom should ope the Tribune's sacred door,
Hearing his step afar. On every side
Great works fed faith in greatness that endured
Irrecognition, patient to abide
Neglect that stung, temptations that allured, —
Supremely proud and in itself secured!

LVII

From the warm bodies Titian loved to paint,
Where life still palpitates in languid glow;
From Raphael's heads of Virgin and of Saint,
Bright with divinest message; from the slow
And patient grandeur Leonardo wrought;
From soft, effeminate Carlo Dolce, faint
With vapid sweetness, to the Titan thought
That shaped the dreams of Michel Angelo:

LVIII

From each and all, through varied speech, I drew
One sole, immortal revelation. They
No longer mocked me with the hopeless view
Of power that with them died, but gave anew
The hope of power that cannot pass away
While Beauty lives: the passion of the brain
Demands possession, nor shall yearn in vain:
Its nymph, though coy, did never yet betray.

LIX

It is not much to earn the windy praise
That fans our early promise: every child

Wears childhood's grace: in unbelieving days
One spark of earnest faith left undefiled
Will burn and brighten like the lamps of old,
And men cry out in haste: "Behold, a star!"
Deeming some glow-worm light, that soon is cold,
The radiant god's approaching avatar!

LX

So I was hailed: and something fawn-like, shy,
Caught from the loneliness of mountain-glens,
That clung around me, drew the stranger's eye
And held my life apart from other men's.
Their prophecies were sweet, and if they breathed
But ignorant hope and shallow pleasure, I
No less from them already saw bequeathed
The crown by avaricious Glory wreathed.

LXI

And, climbing up to San Miniato's height,
Among the cypresses I made a nest
For wandering fancy: down the shimmering west
The Arno slid in creeping coils of light:
O'er Boboli's fan-like pines the city lay
In tints that freshly blossomed on the sight,
Enringed with olive-orchards, thin and gray,
Like moonlight falling in the lap of day.

LXII

There sprang, before me, Giotto's ivory tower;
There hung, a planet, Brunelleschi's dome:
Of living dreams Val d'Arno seemed the home,
From far Careggi's dim-seen laurel bower
To Bellosguardo, smiling o'er the vale;
And pomp and beauty and supremest power,
Blending and brightening in their bridal hour,
Made even the blue of Tuscan summers pale!

LXIII

Immortal Masters! Ye who drank this air
And made it spirit, as the must makes wine,
Be ye the intercessors of my prayer,
Pure Saints of Art, around her holy shrine!
The purpose of your lives bestow on mine, —
The child-like heart, the true, laborious hand
And pious vision, — that my soul may dare
One day to climb the summits where ye stand!

LXIV

Say, shall my memory walk in yonder street
Beside your own, ye ever-living shades?
Shall pilgrims come, gray men and pensive maids,
To pluck this moss because it knew my feet,
And forms of mine move o'er the poet's mind
In thoughts that still to haunting music beat,
And Love and Grief and Adoration find
Their speech in pictures I shall leave behind?

LXV

Ah! they, the Masters, toiled where I but dreamed!
The crown was ready ere they dared to claim
One leaf of honor: then, around them gleamed
No Past, where rival souls of splendid name
At once inspire and bring despair of fame.
A naked heaven was o'er them, where to set
Their kindled stars; and thus the palest yet
Exalted burns o'er all that later came.

LXVI

They unto me were gods : for, though I felt
That nobler 't was, creating, even to fail
Than grandly imitate, my spirit knelt,
Unquestioning, to their authority.
I learned their lives, intent to find a tale
Resembling mine, and deemed my vision free
When most their names obscured with flattering veil
That light of Art which first arose in me.

LXVII

And less for Beauty's single sake inspired
Than old interpretations to attain,
I sought with restless hand and heated brain
Their truth to reach, — by his example fired
Who sketched his mountain-goats on rock or sand,
And his, the wondrous boy, beneath whose hand,
Conferring sanctity with sweet disdain,
A cask became a shrine, a hut a fane.

LXVIII

My studio was the street, the marketplace :
I snared the golden spirit of the sun
Amid his noonday freedom, — swiftly won
The unconscious gift from many a passing face, —
The spoils of color caught from dazzling things,
From unsuspecting forms the sudden grace,
Alive with hope to find the hidden wings
Of the Divine that from the Human springs.

LXIX

A jasmine garland hung above my bed,
Withered and dry : beneath, a picture hung, —
A shadowy likeness of the maid who flung
That crown of welcome. On my sleeping head
The glory of the vanished sunset fell,
And still the leaves reviving fragrance shed,
And dreams crept out of every jasmine-bell,
Inebriate with their fairy hydromel.

LXX

Where was my lost Armida? She had grown
A phantom shape, a star of dreams, alone ;
And I no longer dared to touch the dim
Unfinished features, lest my brush should mar
A memory swift as wings of cherubim
That unto saints in prayer may flash afar
Up the long steep of rifted cloudy walls,
Wherethrough the overpowering glory falls.

LXXI

But, as the Rose will lend its excellence
To the unlovely earth in which it grows,
Until the sweet earth says, "I serve the Rose,"
So, penetrant with her was every sense.
She filled me as the moon a sleeping sea,
That shows the night her orb reflected thence,
Yet deems itself all darkness : silently
The dream of her betrayed itself in me.

LXXII

I had a cherished canvas, whereupon
An antique form of inspiration grew
To other life : beneath a sky of blue,
Filled with the sun and limpid yet with dawn,
A palm-tree rose : its glittering leaves were bowed
As though to let no ray of sunlight through
Their folded shade, and kept the early dew
On all the flowers within its hovering cloud.

LXXIII

Madonna's girlish form, arrested there
With poising foot, and parted lips, and eyes
With innocent wonder, bright and glad surprise,
And hands half-clasped in rapture or in prayer,
Met the Announcing Angel. On her sight
He burst in splendor from the sunny air,
Making it dim around his perfect light,
And in his hand the lily-stem he bare.

LXXIV

Naught else, save, nestling near the Virgin's feet,
A single lamb that wandered from its flock,
And one white dove, upon a splintered rock
Above the yawning valleys, dim with heat.
Beyond, the rifted hills of Gilead flung
Their phantom shadows on the burning veil,
And, far away, one solitary, pale
Vermilion cloud above the Desert hung.

LXXV

I painted her, a budding, spotless maid,
That has not dreamed of man, — for God's high choice
Too humble, yet too pure to be afraid,
And from the music of the Angel's voice
And from the lily's breathing heart of gold
Inspired to feel the mystic beauty laid
Upon her life: the secret is untold,
Unconsciously the message is obeyed.

LXXVI

How much I failed, myself alone could know;
How much achieved, the world. My picture took
Its place with others in the public show,
And many passed, and some remained to look.
While I, in flushed expectancy and fear,
Stood by to watch the gazers come and go,
To note each pausing face, perchance to hear
A careless whisper tell me Fame was near.

LXXVII

"'T is Ghirlandajo's echo!" some would say;
And others, "Here one sees a pupil's hand."
"An innovation, crude, but fairly planned,"
Remarked the connoisseur, and moved away,
Sublimely grave: but one, sometimes, would stand
Silent, with brightening face. No more than this,
Though voiceless praise, ambition could demand,
And for an hour I felt the Artist's bliss.

LXXVIII

One day, a man of haughty port drew nigh, —
A man beyond his prime, but still unbent,
Though the first flakes of age already lent
Their softness to his brow: his wandering eye
Allowed its stately patronage to glide
Along the pictures, till, with gaze intent
He fixed on mine, and startled wonderment
Displaced his air of cold, indifferent pride.

LXXIX

"Signor Marchese!" cried, approaching, one
Who seemed a courtly comrade, "can it be
That in these daubs the touch of Art you see, —
These foreign moons that ape our native sun?"
To whom he said: "The Virgin, Count! 'T is she,
My Clelia! like a portrait just begun,

Where the design is yet but half avowed,
And shimmers on you through a misty cloud:

LXXX

"So, here, I find her. 'T is a marvellous chance.
Your painters choose some peasant beauty's face
For their Madonnas, striving to enhance
By softer tints her coarse plebeian grace
To something heavenly. Here, the features wear
A noble stamp: who painted this is fit
That Clelia's self beside his canvas sit, —
His hand, methinks, might fix her shadow there."

LXXXI

"'T is true, — you wed her then, as I have heard,
And to the young Colonna?" "Even so:
We made the family compact long ago.
A wilful blade, they say, but every bird
Is wiser when he owns a nested mate;
And I shall lose her ere the winter's snow
Falls on the Apennine, — a father's fate!
But from these two my house again may grow.

LXXXII

"She lost, her picture in the lonely hall
Shall speak, from silent lips, her sweet 'good-night!'
And soothe my childless fancy. I'll invite
This painter to the work: his brush has all
The graces of a hand which takes delight
In noble forms, — and thus may best recall,
Though nameless he, what Palma's brush divine
Found in the beauteous mothers of her line!"

LXXXIII

I heard; but trembling, turned away to hide
An ecstasy no longer to be quelled, —
The lover's longing and the artist's pride:
For, though the growing truth of life dispelled
My rash ideal, my very blood had caught
The fine infection: from my heart it welled,
Colored each feeling, perfumed every thought,
And gave desire what hope had left unsought!

LXXXIV

'T was blind, unthinking rapture. Who was she,
Pandolfo's daughter, young Colonna's bride,
The pampered maiden of a house of pride,
That I, though but in thought, should bend the knee
Before her beauty? She was set too high,
And her white lustre wore patrician stains,
Like sunshine falling through heraldic panes
That rise between the altar and the sky.

LXXXV

Next day the Marquis came. With antique air
Of nicest courtesy, his words did sue
The while his tone commanded: could I spare
Some hours? — a portrait only, it was true,
But the Great Masters painted portraits too,
Even Raffaëllo: at his palace, then!
The Lady Clelia would await me there:
His thanks, — to-morrow, should it be? — at ten.

LXXXVI

But when the hour approached, and o'er me hung
The shadow of the high Palladian walls,

My heart beat fast in feverish intervals:
I half drew back: the lackeys open flung
The brazen portals, — broad before me rose
The marble stairs, — above them gleamed the halls,
And I ascended, as a man who goes
To see some unknown gate of life unclose.

LXXXVII

They bore my easel to a spacious room
Whose northern windows curbed the eager day,
But under them a sunny garden lay:
A fountain sprang: the myrtles were in bloom,
And I remembered, — "ere the winter's snow
Cloaks Apennine" Colonna bears away
Her who shall wear them. 'T is a woman's doom,
I laughed, — she seeks no other: let her go!

LXXXVIII

Lo! rustling forward with a silken sound,
Her living self advanced! — as fair and frail
As May's first lily in a Northern vale,
As light in airy grace, as when she crowned
Her painter's head, — the Genius of my Fame!
Ah, words are vain where Music's tongue would fail,
And Color's brightest miracles be found
Imperfect, cold, to match her as she came!

LXXXIX

The blood that gathered, stifling, at my heart,
Surged back again, and burned on cheek and brow.
"Your model!" smiled the Marquis; "you 'll avow
That she is not unworthy of your art.
I see you note the likeness, — it is strange:
But since you dreamed her face so nearly, now
You 'll paint it, — as she is, — I want no change:"
Then left, with wave of hand and stately bow.

XC

A girlish wonder dawned in Clelia's face.
Her frank, pure glances seemed to question mine,
Or scanned my features, seeking to retrace
Her way to me along some gossamer line
Of memory, almost found, then lost again.
Meanwhile, I set my canvas in its place,
Recalled the artist-nature, though with pain,
And tamed to work the tumult of my brain.

XCI

"I give you trouble," then she gently said.
My 'brow was damp, my hand unsteady. "Nay,"
I answered: "'t is the grateful price I pay
For that fair wreath you cast upon my head."
She started, blushing: all at once she found
The shining clew, — her silvery laughter made
The prelude to her words: "the flowers will fade,
But by your hand am I forever crowned!"

BOOK II

THE WOMAN

I

Oh give not Beauty to an artist's eye
And deem his heart, untroubled, can withstand
Her necromancy, changing earth and sky
To one wide net wherein her captives lie! —
Nor, since his mind the measure takes, his hand
Essays the semblance of each hue and line,
That cold his pulses beat, as if he scanned
Her marble death and not her life divine!

II

How could I view the sombre-shining hair
Without the tingling, passionate wish to feel
Its silken smoothness? How the golden-pale
Pure oval of the face, the forehead fair,
The light of eyes whose dusky depths conceal
Love's yet unkindled torch, and wear the mail
Of cruel Art, that bade me mimic bliss
And only paint the mouth I burned to kiss?

III

So near, the airy wave her voice set free
Smote warm against my cheek! So near, I heard
The folds that hid her bosom, as they stirred
Above the heart-beat measuring now, for me,
Life's only music! Ah, so near, and yet
Between us rose a wall I could not see,
To dash me back, — before the wings that fret
For love's release, a crystal barrier set!

IV

I kissed, in thought, each clear, delicious tint
That lured my mocking hand: my passion flung
Its lurking sweetness over every print
Of the soft brush that to her beauty clung,
And fondled while it toiled, — and day by day
The canvas brightened with her brightening face:
The artist gloried in the picture's grace,
But, ah! the lover's chances lapsed away.

V

And now, — the last! The grapes already wore
Victorious purple, ere their trodden death,
The olives darkened through their branches hoar,
And from below the tuberose's breath
Died round the casement, from the spicy shore
Of ripened summer, passionate as the sigh
I stifled: and my heart said, — "Speak or die!
The moment's fate stands fixed forevermore."

VI

The naked glare of breezeless afternoon
Dazzled without: the garden swooned in heat.
The old duenna drooped her head, and soon
Behind the curtain slumbered in her seat.
Within my breast the crowded, panting beat

Disturbed my hand: the pencil fell: I turned,
And with imploring eyes and tears that burned
Sank in despairing silence at her feet.

VII

I did not dare look up, but knelt, as waits
A foiled tyrannicide the headsman's blow:
At first a frightened hush, — the stealthy, slow,
Soft rustle of her dress, — a step like Fate's
To crown or smite: but now descended, where
Her garland fell, her hand upon my hair,
And, light as floating leaf of orchard-snow
Loosed by the pulse of Spring, it trembled there.

VIII

Then I looked up, — Oh, grace of God! to feel
Her answering tears like dew upon my brow;
To touch and kiss her blessing hand; to seal
Without a word the one eternal vow
Of man and woman, when their lives unite
Thenceforth forever, soul and body shared,
Like those the Grecian goddess, pitying, paired
To form the young, divine Hermaphrodite.

IX

I breathed: "You do not love Colonna?" "No,"
She whispered, "aid me, I am yours to save!"
"I yours to help, your lover and your slave, —
My soul, my blood is yours," I murmured low.
The old duenna stirred: "When? where? one hour
For your commands!" As hurriedly she gave
Reply: "The garden, — yonder darkest bower,
When midnight tolls from Santa Croce's tower!"

X

Ere the immortal light had time to fade
In either's eyes, the old Marchese came.
I veiled, in toil, the flush that still betrayed,
And Clelia, strong to hide her maiden shame,
The motion of her father's hand obeyed
And left us. Gravely he my work surveyed:
"'T is done, I think, — 't is she, indeed," he said:
"'T was time," he muttered, as he turned his head.

XI

I bowed in silence, took his offered gold,
And down the marble stairs, through doors that cried,
On scornful hinges, of their owner's pride,
Passed on my way: my happy heart did fold
Pandolfo's treasure in its secret hold,
And every bell that chimed the feeble day
Down to its crimson burial, seemed to say:
"Not yet, not yet, for Love our tongues have tolled!"

XII

More slowly rolled the silver disk above
The hiding hills, than ever moon came up:
The sky's begemmed and sapphire-tinted cup
Spilled o'er its dew, and Heaven in nuptial love
Stretched forth his mystic arms, and crouched beside
The yearning Earth, his dusky-featured bride:
The pulses of the Night began to move,
And Life's eternal secret ruled the tide.

XIII

Along the shadow of the garden-walls
I crept: the streets were still, or only beat
To wavering echoes by unsteady feet
Of wine-flushed revellers from banquet halls.
They saw me not: the yielding door I gained,
And glided down a darksome alley, sweet
With slumbering roses, to the shy retreat
Of bashful bliss and yearning unprofaned.

XIV

The amorous odors of the moveless air, —
Jasmine and tuberose and gillyflower,
Carnation, heliotrope, and purpling shower
Of Persian roses, — kissed my senses there
To keenest passion, clad my limbs with power
Like some young god's, when at the banquet first
He drinks fresh deity with eager thirst, —
And midnight rang from Santa Croce's tower!

XV

She came! a stealthy, startled, milk-white fawn,
Thridding the tangled bloom: a balmy wave
Foreran her coming, and the blushful dawn
Of Love its color to the moonlight gave,
And Night grew splendid. In a trance divine,
Hand locked in hand, with kissing pulse, we clung,
Then heart to heart; and all her being flung
Its sweetness to the lips, and mixed with mine.

XVI

Immortal Hour, whose starry torch did guide
Eternal Love to his embalmèd nest
In virgin bosoms, — Hour, supremely blest
Beyond thy sisters, lift thy brow in pride,
And say to her whose muffled beams invest
The bed where Strength lies down at Beauty's side,
"Before my holier lamp thy forehead hide:
Give up thy crown: the joy I bring is best!"

XVII

"O saved, not lost, — Madonna, bless thy child!"
She murmured then; and I as fondly, "Death
Come now, and close my over-happy breath
On sacred lips, that shall not be defiled
By grosser kisses!" "Fail me not," she said,
And clung the closer, — "God is overhead,
And hears you." "Yea," I whispered wild,
"And may His thunder strike the false one dead!"

XVIII

No thought had she of lineage or of place:
Love washed the colors from her blazoned shield
To make a mirror for her lover's face,
Unto patrician ignorance revealed
The bliss to give, the ecstasy to yield,
And now, descended from her stately dream,
She trod the happy level of her race,
In perfect, sweet surrender, faith supreme.

XIX

With cautious feet, in dewy sandals shod,
And sidelong look, the perfumed Hours went by;
Until the azure darkness of the sky
Withered aloft, and shameless Morning trod
Her clashing bells. Our paradise was past,
And yet to part was bitterer than to die.
We rose: we turned: we held each other fast,
Each kiss the fonder as it seemed the last.

XX

O happy Earth! To Love's triumphant heart
Thou still art convoyed by the singing stars
That hailed thy birth: Heaven's beauteous counterpart,
No shadow dims thee, no convulsion mars
Thy fair green bosom: on thy forehead shine
The golden lilies of the bridegroom Day,
Thy hoary forests take the bloom of May,
Thy seas the sparkle of the autumn wine!

XXI

Serenely beautiful, the brightening morn
Led on the march of mine enchanted round
Of days, wherein the world was freshly born,
And men with primal purity recrowned:
So deep my drunkenness of heart and brain,
That Art, o'ershadowed, sat as if forlorn
In Love's excess of glory, and in vain
Essayed my old allegiance to regain.

XXII

She to the regions o'er our lives unfurled
Is turned: from that which never is, she draws
Her best achievements and her finest laws,
And more enriches than she owes, the world, —
Whence, leading Life, she rules; till Life, in turn,
Feels in its veins the warmer ether burn,
Asserts itself, and bids its service pause,
To *be* the beauty it was vowed to earn!

XXIII

And my transfigured heart no baby-love,
With dimpled face, had taken to its nest,
But that Titanic, pre-Olympian guest,
The elder god, who bears his slaves above
The fret of Time, the frowns of Circumstance;
And, twin with Will, engendered in my breast
A certain vision of a life in rest,
And love secured against the shocks of chance.

XXIV

It was enough to feel his potent arm
Lift me aloft, like giant Christopher,
Above the flood. Could he the dragon charm
Whose fanged and gilded strength still guarded her?
The crumbling pride of twice three hundred years,
Trembling in dotage at the ghost of harm,
Could he subdue? Ah, wherefore summon fears
To vex the faith that never reappears!

XXV

But she the more, whose swift-approaching fate
Shamed the exulting bliss that made me free,
And clouded hers, thereon did meditate.
When next she met me at the garden-gate,
Its chilling shadow fell upon me. "See!"
She said, and dangled in the balmy dark
(The moon was down) a chain of jewelry,
That, snake-like, burned with many a diamond spark.

XXVI

"His bridal gift!" she whispered: "he will come,
Erelong, to claim me. Speech, and tears, and prayer,
Are vain my father's will to overbear,
And better were it had my lips been dumb.
Incredulous, he heard with wondering stare

My pleading: 'Keep me, father, at your side!
I will not be that wanton prince's bride, —
Unwed, your lonely palace let me share!'

XXVII

"Much more I said, not daring to reveal
Our secret; but, alas! I spoke in vain.
He coldly smiled and raised me: 'Do not kneel, —
'T is useless: here 's a pretty, childish rain
For nothing, but the sun will shine anon.
What ails the girl? the compact shall remain.
Pandolfo's name is not so newly won,
That we can smutch it, and not feel the stain.'

XXVIII

"He spoke my doom; but death were sweeter now,
Since, O my best-belovèd, life alone
Is where your eyes, your lips, can meet my own,
And Heaven commands, that registered your vow,
To save me, and fulfil it!" Then, around
My neck her white, imploring arms were thrown;
Her heart beat in mine ears with plaintive sound,
So close and piteously she held me bound.

XXIX

Ah me! 't was needless further to rehearse
The old romance, that life has ne'er belied,
The old offence which love repeats to pride, —
The strife, the supplication, and the curse
Hung like a thunder-cloud above the dawn,
To threat the day: it better seemed, to fly
Beyond the circle of that sullen sky,
And storms let idly loose when we were gone.

XXX

"Darling," I answered, staking all my fate
On the sole chance within my beggared hands, —
"Darling, the wealth of love is my estate,
Save one poor home, that in a valley stands,
Cool, dark, and lonesome, far beyond the line
Of wintry peaks that guard the summer lands;
But shelter safe, though paler suns may shine,
And Paradise, when once 't is yours and mine!

XXXI

"See! I am all I give: I cannot ask
That you should leave the laurel and the rose,
And halls of yellowing marble, meant to bask
In endless sun, and airs of old repose
That fan the beauteous ages, elsewhere lost, —
To see the world put on its deathly mask
Of low, gray sky and ever-deepening snows,
And dip its bowers in darkness and in frost."

XXXII

"Nay, let" (she cried) "his mellow marbles shine
In Roman noons, — his fountains flap the airs,
And rank and splendor crowd his gilded stairs,
Wait in his halls, or drink his banquet-wine, —
So ne'er the hateful pomp I spurn be mine;
But take me, love! for ah, the father, too,
Who for his early claims my later cares,
Is leagued with him, — and I am left to you!"

XXXIII

"So, then, shall Summer cross the Alpine chain
And scare the autumn crocus from the meads;

And the wan naiads, 'mid their brittle reeds,
Feel the chill wave its languid pulse regain,
Wooing the azure brook-flowers into bloom
To greet your coming; and the golden rain
Of beechen forests shall your path illume,
Till the Year's bonfire burn away its gloom!"

XXXIV

Thus, at her words, my sudden rapture threw
Its glory on the scene so bleak before,
As to the nightly mariner a shore
That out of hollow darkness slowly grew,
Seeming huge cliffs that menaced with the roar
Of hungry surf, when Morning lifts her torch
Flashes at once to gardens dim with dew,
And homes and temples fair with pillared porch.

XXXV

"Away!" was Love's command, and we obeyed;
And Chance assisted, ere three times the sun
Looked o'er the planet's verge, that swiftly spun
To bring the hour so perilously delayed
My fortune with Colonna's now was weighed;
But that brief time of love's last liberty —
Pandolfo called to Rome, ere aught betrayed
His daughter's secret — turned the scale to me.

XXXVI

My mules were waiting by the city gate,
With Gianni, quick to lead a lover's fate
Along the bridle-paths of Apennine, —
A gallant contadino, whom I knew
From crown to sole, each joint and clear-drawn line
Of plaited muscle, healthy, firm, and true;
And midnight struck, as from the garden came
She who forsook for me her home and name.

XXXVII

With them she laid aside her silken shell
And jewel-sparks, and chains of moony pearl, —
Bright, babbling toys, that of her rank might tell, —
And wore, to cheat the drowsy sentinel,
The scarlet bodice of a peasant-girl,
Her wealth the golden dagger in her hair:
The haughty vestures from her beauty fell,
Leaving her woman, simply pure and fair.

XXXVIII

The gate was passed: before us, through the night,
We traced the dusky road, and far away,
Where ceased the stars, we knew the mountains lay.
There must we climb before their shoulders, white
With autumn rime, should redden to the day;
But now a line of faintly-scattered light
Plays o'er the dust, and the old olives calls
To ghostly life above the orchard-walls.

XXXIX

A little chapel, built by pious hands,
That foot-sore pilgrims from the blistering soil
May turn, or laborers from summer toil
To rest that breathes of God, it open stands;
And there her shrine with daily flowers is dressed,
Her lamp is nightly trimmed and fed with oil,
The Mater Dolorosa, in whose breast,
Bleeding, the seven swords of woe are pressed.

XL

"Stay!" whispered Clelia, as the narrow vault
Yawned with its faded frescoes, and the lamp
Revealed, untouched by rust or blurred with damp,
The Virgin's face: it beckoned us to halt
And lay our love before her feet divine,
A priestless sacrament, — so kneeling there
In self-bestowed espousal, Clelia's prayer
Spake to the Mother's heart her trust in mine.

XLI

"O Sorrowing Mother! Heaven's exalted Queen!
Star of the Sea! Lily among the Thorns!
Clothed with the sun, while round Thy feet serene
The crescent planet curves her silver horns,
Be Thou my star to still this trembling sea
Within my bosom, — let the love that mourns
One with the love that here rejoices, be,
Soothed in Thy peace, acceptable to Thee!

XLII

"Thou who dost hide the maiden's virgin fear
In thine enclosèd garden, Fountain sealed
Of Woman's holiest secrets, bend Thine ear
To these weak words of one whose heart must yield
This temple of the body Thou didst wear
To love, — and by Thy pity, oft revealed,
Pure Priestess, hearken to Thy daughter's prayer,
And bless the bond, of other blessing bare!

XLIII

"Mother of Wisdom, in whose heart are thrust
The seven swords of Sorrow, in whose pain
Thy chaste Divinity draws near again
To maids and mothers, crying from the dust, —
Who ne'er forgettest any human woe,
Once doubly Thine, Thy grace and comfort show,
And perfect make, O Star above the Sea,
These nuptial pledges, only heard by Thee!"

XLIV

Then Clelia's hand entrusted she to mine,
Who knelt beside her, and the vow she spake,
Weeping: "I take him, Mother, at Thy shrine.
Home, country, father, leave I for his sake,
Give my pure name, my maiden honor break
For him, my spouse!" And I: "I give my life,
Chaste, faithful to the end, to her, my wife,
Whom here, O Mother, at Thy hands I take!"

XLV

Thus, in the lack of Earth's ordaining rite,
Did our own selves our union consecrate;
But God was listening from the hollow Night.
Beyond the stars we felt His smile create
Dawn in the doubtful twilight of our fate:
Peace touched our hearts and sacredest content:
The veil was lifted from our perfect light
Of nuptial love, pure-burning, reverent.

XLVI

The Sorrowing Mother gazed. So pure the kiss
I gave, Her own divinest lips had ta'en
From mine no trace of sense-reflected stain;
But Gianni called us from the dream of bliss.
"Haste, Signor, haste!" he cried: "the Bear drops low:

Soon will the cocks in all the gardens crow
The morning watch: day comes, and night again,
But come to part, not mate, unless you go!"

XLVII

Then silent, side by side, we forward fled
Through the chill airs of night: each falling hoof
Beat like a flail beneath the thresher's roof,
In quick, unvarying time: and rosy-red
Crept o'er the gray, as nimbly Gianni led
Our devious flight along the barren steeps,
Till, far beyond the sinking, misty deeps,
The sun forsook his Adriatic bed.

XLVIII

There is a village perched, as you emerge
From the Santerno's long and winding vale
Towards Imolâ, upon the cliffy verge
Of the last northern prop of Apennine, —
Old, yellow houses, hinting many a tale
Of ducal days and Este's tragic line,
And over all uplifted, orange pale
Against the blue, a belfry slim and fine.

XLIX

With weary climbing of the rocky stair
Thither we came, and in a hostel rude
Sat down, outworn, to breathe securer air,
Our guide dismissed, nor eyes that might intrude,
Among the simple inmates of the place.
The brightest stars of heaven watched o'er us there
In sweet conjunction, every dread to chase,
To close the Past, and make the Future fair.

L

Ah, had we dared to linger in that nest, —
To watch from under overhanging eaves,
The loaded vines, the poplars' twinkling leaves, —
Afar, the breadth of the Romagna's breast
And Massa's, Lugo's towers, — the little stir
Of innocent life, caress and be caressed,
Rank, Art, and Fame among the things that were,
And all her bliss in me, as mine in her!

LI

But Florence was too near: my purpose held
To bear and hide our happiness afar
In the dark mountains, lonely, greenest-delled;
And still, each night, the never-setting star
We followed took in heaven a loftier stand, —
Sparkled on other rivers, other towns,
Glinting from icy horns and snowy crowns
Until we trod the green Bavarian land!

LII

And evermore, behind us on the road,
Pursuit, a phantom, drove. If we delayed,
Some coward pulse our meeting bosoms frayed;
Our tale the breezes blew, the sunshine glowed;
The stars our secret ecstasies betrayed:
Drunk with our passion's vintage, we must fill
The cup too full, and tremble lest it spill, —
Obeying, thus, the law we would evade.

LIII

Now, from that finer ether sinking down
Into the humble, universal air,
The images of many a human care
That, wren-like, build beneath the thatch of love,
Came round us. O'er the watery levels, brown

With autumn stubble, the departing dove
Cooed her farewell to summer: rainy-cold
Through rocky gates the yellow Danube rolled.

LIV

Grim were the mountains, with their dripping pines
Planted in sodden moss, and swiftly o'er
Their crests the clouds their flying fleeces tore:
The herd-boy, from his lair of furze and vines
Peered out, beside his dogs; and forms uncouth,
The axemen, from the steeps descending, wore
The strength of manhood, but its grace no more, —
The lust, without the loveliness, of youth!

LV

The swollen streams careered beside us, hoarse
As warning prophets in an evil age,
And through the stormy fastnesses our course,
Blown, buffeted with elemental rage,
Fell, with the falling night, to that lone vale
I pictured, with its meads of crocus-bloom, —
Ah me, engulfed and lost in drowning gloom,
The helpless sport and shipwreck of the gale!

LVI

Where now the bright autumnal bonfires? Where
The gold of beechen woods, the prodigal
And dazzling waste of color in its fall?
The brook-flowers, bluer than the morning-air?
"My pomp of welcome mocked you, love!" I sighed:
"The sign was false, the flattering dream denied:
Unkind is Nature, yet all skies are fair
To trusting hearts, when once their truth is tried!"

LVII

But Clelia shuddered, clinging to my heart
When the low roof received us, and the sound
Of threshing branches boomed and whistled round
Our cot, that stood a little way apart
Against the forest, from the village strayed,
Where cunning workmen in their prisons bound
The roaring Fiend of Fire, and forced his aid
To mould the crystal wonders of their trade.

LVIII

Poor was our home, and when the rainy sky
Brought forth a child of Night, an Ethiop day,
And still the turbid torrents thundered by,
From the drear landscape she would turn away, —
Her thoughts, perchance, where gilded Florence lay, —
To hide a tear, or crush a rising sigh,
Then sing the sweet Italian songs, where run
Twin rills of words and music into one.

LIX

I, too, beneath the low-hung rafters saw
In dusk that filtered through the narrow panes,
My palette spread with colors dull and raw,
Once ripe and juicy-fresh as blossom-stains.
The dim, beclouded season never brought
The light that flatters; but its mists and rains
Like eating rust upon my canvas wrought,
And turned to substance cold the tinted thought.

LX

Around me moved a rough and simple race
Whose natures, fresh and uncontaminate,

Gave truth to life, and smoothed their toilful fate
With honesty and love — but lacked the grace
Of strength allied to beauty, or the free
Unconscious charm of Southern symmetry,
And motions measured by a rhythm elate
And joyous as the cadence of the sea.

LXI

For if, at times, among the slaves who fed
The ever-burning kilns, in fiercest glow
Some naked torso momently would show
Like Hell's strong angel, dipped in lurid red,
No model this for Saviour, seraph, saint,
Ensphered in golden ether: Labor's taint
Defaced the form, and here 't were vain, I said,
Some lovely hint to find, and finding, paint!

LXII

Ah, Art and Love! Immortal brother-gods,
That will not dwell together, nor apart,
But make your temple in your servant's heart
A house of battle. One his forehead nods
In drowsy bliss, and will not be disturbed,
The other's eager forces work uncurbed,
Yet most in each the other lives; and each
Mounts by the other's help his crown to reach.

LXIII

To Love my debt was greatest: I compelled
Back to their sleep the dreams that stung in vain,
And folded Clelia in a love which held
The heart all fire, although its flame was nursed
By embers borrowed from the smouldering brain.
For her had Art aspired; but now, reversed
The duty, Art for her must abnegate
Its restless, proud resolves, and idly wait.

LXIV

The rains had whitened in the upper air,
And left their chill memorials glittering now
On Arber's shoulders, Ossa's hornèd brow;
The summer forest of its gold was bare;
Loud o'er the changeless pines November drove
His frosty steeds, through narrowing days that wear
No light; and Winter settled from above,
White, heavy, cold, around our nest of love.

LXV

The sportive fantasies of wind and snow,
The corniced billows which they love to pile,
The ermined woods, with boughs depending low,
To buttress frozenly each darksome aisle,
The spectral hills which twilight veils in dun,
The season's hushing sounds, — my Clelia won
From haunting memories, and stayed awhile
Her homesick pining for the Tuscan sun.

LXVI

Only, when after briefest day, the moon
Poured down an icy light, and all around
Came from the iron woods a crackling sound,
As from the stealthy steps of Cold, and soon
The long-drawn howl of famished wolf was heard
Far in the mountains, like a shuddering bird
Beside my heart a nestling place she found,
And smiled to hear my fond, assuring word.

LXVII

So drifted on, till Death's white shadow passed
From edgèd air and stony earth, our fate:
Then from the milder cloud and loosening blast
Unto his sunnier nooks returning late,
Came Life, and let his flowery footprint stand.
Softer than wing of dove, the winds at last
Kissed where they smote; the skies were blue and bland,
And in their lap reposed the ravished land.

LXVIII

Then tears of gummy crystal wept the pine,
And like a phantom plume, the sea-green larch
Was dropped along the mountain's lifted arch,
And morning on the meadows seemed to shine,
All day, in blossoms: cuckoo-songs were sweet,
And sweet the pastoral music of the kine
Chiming a thousand bells aloft, to meet
The herdsman's horn, the young lamb's wandering bleat!

LXIX

Under the forest's sombre eaves there slept
No darkness, but a balsam-breathing shade,
Rained through with light: the hurrying waters made
Music amid the solitude, and swept
Their noise of liquid laughter from afar,
Through smells of sprouting leaf and trampled grass,
And thousand tints of flowery bell and star,
To sing the year's one idyl ere it pass!

LXX

And down the happy valleys wandered we,
Released and glad, the children of the sun, —
I by adoption and by nature she, —
And still our love a riper color won
From the strong god in whom all colors burn.
The Earth regained her ancient alchemy
To cheat our souls with dreams of what might be,
And never is, — yet, wherefore these unlearn?

LXXI

For they reclothe us with a mantle, lent
From the bright wardrobe of the Gods: the powers,
The glories of the Possible are ours:
We breathe the pure, sustaining element
Above the dust of life, — steal fresh content
From distant gleams of never-gathered flowers, —
Believing, rise: our very failures wear
Immortal grace from what we vainly dare!

LXXII

From dreams like these is shaped the splendid act
In painters', poets' brains: we let them grow,
And as the season rolled in richer flow
To summer, from their waves a wondrous fact
Uprose, and shamed them with diviner glow, —
A tremulous secret, mystic, scarce-confessed,
That, star-like, throbs within the coarsest breast,
And sets God's joy beside His creature's woe.

LXXIII

As one may see, along some April rill,
By richest mould and softest dew-fall fed,
The daybreak blossom of a daffodil
Send from its heart a tenderer blossom still,
Flower bearing flower, so fair a marvel shed
Its bliss on Clelia's being; and she smiled
With those prophetic raptures which fulfil
The mother's nature ere she clasps her child.

LXXIV

Between our hearts, embracing both, there stole
A silent Presence, like to that which reigns
In Heaven, when God another world ordains.
Here, in its genesis, a formless soul
Waited the living garment it should wear
Of holiest flesh, though ours were dark with stains, —
Yet clouds that blot the blue, eternal air,
Upon their folds the rainbow's beauty bear!

LXXV

And none of all the folk we moved among
In that lone valley, whether man or maid,
Or weary woman, prematurely wrung
To bear the lusty flock that round her played,
But spake to Clelia in a gentler tongue
And unto her their timid reverence paid,
As, in her life repeated, one might see
Madonna's pure maternal sanctity!

LXXVI

All knew the lady, beautiful and tall, —
Dark, yet so pale in her strange loveliness,
Whom oft they saw with gliding footstep press
The meads, the forest's golden floor; and all
Knew the enchanted voice, whose alien song
Silenced the mountains, till the woodman lone
His axe let fall, and dreamed and listened long, —
The key-flower plucked, the fairy gold his own!

LXXVII

Never, they said, did year its bounty shower
So plenteously upon their fields, as now.
The lady brought their fortune: many a vow
Would rise to help her in her woman's hour
Of pain and joy, and what their hands could do
(The will was boundless, though so mean the power)
Was hers, — their queen, the fairest thing they knew
Within the circle of the mountains blue.

LXXVIII

And Autumn came, like him from Edom, him
With garments dyed, from Bozrah, glorious
In his apparel; yet his gold was dim,
His crimsons pale, beside the splendors warm
Wherewith the ripened time transfigured us.
The precious atoms drawn from heaven and earth,
And rocked by Love's own music into form,
Compacted lived: a soul awaited birth.

LXXIX

A soul was born. The hazy-mantled sun
Looked in on Clelia, radiant as a saint
Who triumphs over torture, pale and faint
From parted life, — and kissed the life begun
With tender light, as quick to recognize
His child, in exile: the unconscious one, —
Stray lamb of heaven, whom tears might best baptize, —
Closed on her happy breast his mother's eyes.

LXXX

Her eyes they were: her fresh-born beauty took
Its seat in man, that woman's heart might bow
One day, before the magic of that look
Which conquered man and held him captive now.
The frail and precious mould which drew from me
Naught but its sex, her likeness did endow
With breathing grace and witching symmetry,
As once in baby demigod might be.

LXXXI

So came from him — as in Correggio's "Night"
The body of the Holy Child illumes
The stable dark, the starry Syrian glooms,
The rapt, adoring faces, — sudden light
For that dark season when the sun hung low;
And warmth, when earth again lay cold and white;
And peace, Love reconciled with Life to know;
And promise, kindling Art to rosier glow.

LXXXII

Here dawned the inspiration, long delayed,
The light of loftier fancy. As she pressed,
Cradled against her balmy mother-breast,
The child — a pink on sun-kissed lilies laid —
I saw the type of old achievement won
In them, the holy hint their forms conveyed:
And lovelier never God's Elected Maid
And Goddess-Mother dreamed Urbino's son!

LXXXIII

But she — when first mine eager hand would seize
Her perfect beauty — troubled grew, and pale.
"Dear Egon, No!" she said: "my heart would fail,
Alarmed for love that wraps in sanctities
Its earthly form: for see! the babe may lie
With white, untainted soul, and in his eye
The light of Heaven, and pure as almond-flowers
His dimpling flesh, — but, Egon, he is ours!

LXXXIV

"If blessing may be forfeited, to set
A child, the loveliest, in the place divine
Of Infant God, it were more impious yet
To veil the Mother's countenance in mine:
Ah, how should I, to human love though fair,
Assume her grace and with her pity shine, —
Profane usurpress of her sacred shrine,
To cheat the vow and intercept the prayer!"

LXXXV

A woman's causeless fancy! What I said
I scarce remember, — that the face I stole
Had brought herself, and if the half so wrought,
A surer blessing now must bring the whole,
And laurel cast, not jasmine, on my head.
The profanation was a thing of thought,
Or touched the artist only: who could paint,
If saint alone dare model be for saint?

LXXXVI

And so, by Art possessed, I would not see
Forebodings which in woman's finer sense
Arise, and draw their own fulfilment thence, —
Light clouds, yet hide the bolts of Destiny
And darken life, erelong. I gave, in joy,
To fleeting grace immortal permanence,
And dreamed of coming fame for all the three,
Myself, the fairest mother, and the boy!

LXXXVII

She sat, in crimson robe and mantle blue,
Fondling the child in holy nakedness,
Resigned and calm, — alas! I could not guess
The haunting fear that daily deeper grew
In the sweet face that would its fear subdue,
Nor make my hand's creative rapture less:
But cold her kisses to my own replied,
And when the work completed stood — she sighed.

LXXXVIII

And from that hour a shadow seemed to hang
Around her life: our idyl breathed no more
Its flute-like joy in every strain she sang:
Her step the measures of an anthem wore,
That hushes, soothes, yet makes not wholly sad;
And if, at times, my heart confessed a pang
To note the haunted gleam her features had,
I failed to read the prophecy it bore.

LXXXIX

Again the summer beckoned from the hills,
And back from Daulis came the nightingale;
But when the willows shook by meadow-rills
Their sheeted silver, Clelia's cheek grew pale.
She spoke not; but I knew her fancy said:
So shook the olives now in Arno's vale,
So flashed the brook along its pebbly bed,
Through bosky oleanders, roofed with red!

XC

This cheer I gave: "Be sure my fame awaits
The work of love: this cloud will break, and we
Walk in the golden airs of Tuscany,
Guarded by that renown which consecrates
Our fault, if love be such; and fame shall be
My shield, to shame your father's heraldry,
And set you in your ancient halls. Take heart,
And as my love you trusted, trust my art!"

XCI

She faintly smiled, — if smile the lips could stir
Which more of yearning than of hope expressed;
A filmy mask to hide the warning guest
Of thought which evermore abode in her:
And then she kissed me, — not, as once with fire
And lingering sweetness drawn from love's desire,
But soft, as Heaven's angelic messenger
Might touch the lips of prayer, and make them blest!

BOOK III

THE CHILD

I

Sad Son of Earth, if ever to thy care
Some god entrust the dazzling gift of joy,
Within thy trembling hands the burden bear
As if the frailest crystal shell it were,
One thrill of exultation might destroy!
Look to thy feet, take heed where thou shalt stand,
And arm thine eyes with fear, thy heart with prayer,
Like one who travels in a hostile land!

II

For, ever hovering in the heart of day
Unseen, above thee wait the Powers malign,
Who scent thy bliss as vultures scent decay:
Unveil thy secret, give one gladsome sign,
Send up one thought to chant beside the lark
In airy poise, and lo! the sky is dark
With swooping wings, — thy gift is snatched away
Ere dies the rapture which proclaimed it thine!

III

We plan the houses which are never built:
The volumes which our precious thoughts enclose
Are never written: in the falchion's hilt
Sleeps nobler daring than the hero shows:
And never Fate allows a life to give
The measure of a soul, — but incomplete
Expression and imperfect action meet,
To form the tintless sketch of what we live.

IV

I would not see the path that led apart
My Clelia's feet, as 't were on hills of cloud,
But deemed the saintlier light, whereto I bowed
In reverence of mine adoring heart,
The mother's nature: day by day I smiled,
As higher, further drawn, my dreams avowed
Diviner types of beauty, — whence beguiled,
Her robes of heaven I wrapped around her child.

V

Our daily miracle was he: a bud
Steeped in the scents of Eden, balmy fair,
The world's pure morning bright upon his hair,
And life's unopened roses in his blood!
In the blank eyes of birth a timorous star
Of wonder sparkled, as the soul awoke,
And from his tongue a brook-like babbling broke, —
A strange, melodious language from afar!

VI

His body showed, in every dimpled swell,
The pink and pearl of Ocean's loveliest shell,
And swift the little pulses throbbed along
Their turquoise paths, the soft breast rose and fell
As to the music of a dancing song,
And all the darling graces which belong
To babyhood, and breathe from every limb,
Made life more beautiful, revealed in him.

VII

His mother's face I dared not paint again,
For now, infected by her mystic dread,
The picture smote me with reproachful pain;
But often, bending o'er his cradle-bed
To learn by heart the wondrous tints and lines
That charmed me so, my kindling fancy said:
"By thee, my Cherub, shall mine art be led
To clasp the Truth it now but half divines!

VIII

"If I have sinned, to set thee in the place
Of Infant God, the hand that here offends
Shall owe its cunning to thy growing grace,
And from thy loveliness make late amends.
Six summers more, and I shall bid thee stand
Before me, with uplift, prophetic face,
And there St. John shall grow beneath my hand, —
A bright boy-angel in a desert land!

IX

"Six summers more, and then, as Ganymede's,
Thy rosy limbs against the dark-blue sky
Shall press the eagle's plumage as he speeds;
Or darling Hylas, 'mid Scamander's reeds,
Borrow thy beauty: six again, and I
Shall from thy lithesome adolescence take
My young St. George, my victor knight, and make
Beneath thy sword once more the Dragon die!

X

"Art thou not mine? and wilt thou not repay
My love with help unconsciously bestowed?
In thy fresh being, in its bright abode,
Shall I not find my morning-star, my day?
Rejoice! one life, at least, shall deathless be, —
One perfect form grow ripe, but not decay:
Through mine own blood shall I my triumph see,
And give to glory what I steal from thee!"

XI

One day, in indolence of sheer despair,
I sat with hanging arm, the colors dried
Upon my palette: sudden, at my side
Knelt Clelia, lifting through her falling hair
A look that stabbed me with its tearful care;
And words that came like swiftly-dropping tears
Made my heart ache and shiver in mine ears,
As thus in sorrow and in love she cried:

XII

"O Egon, mine the fault! I should have dared
Defy the compact, — should have set you, love,
As far in station as in soul above
These mocking wants — mine idle fortune shared
With your achievement! Coward heart, that fled
The post of righteous battle, and prepared
For you, whose hand and brain I could not wed,
Meaning to bless, a martyrdom instead!

XIII

"I hold you back, alas! when you aspire;
I chain your spirit when it pants to soar:
I, proud to kindle, glad to feed the fire,
But heap cold ashes on its fading core!
Command me, Egon! shall I seek the sire
Whose lonely house might welcome me once more,
And mine — my twain belovèd? Let me make
This late, last trial for our future's sake!"

XIV

"Not thine, my Clelia!" soothing her, I said,
"Not thine the fault — nor ours; but Demons wait
To thwart the shining purposes of Fate,
And not a crown descends on any head
Ere half its fairest leaves are plucked or dead:
Yet be it as thou wilt, — who bore thee thence
Must in thy father's house thee reinstate,
Or bear — not thou — the weight of his offence.

XV

"Come, thou art pale, and sad, and sick for home,
My summer lilly — nursling of the sun!
But thou shalt blossom in the breeze of Rome,
And dip thy feet in Baiæ's whispering foam,
And in the torn Abruzzi valleys, dun
With August stubble, watch thy wild fawn run, —
I swear it! With the melting of the snow,
If Fortune or if Ruin guide, we go!"

XVI

And soon there came, as 't were an answering hint
From heaven, the tardy gold Madonna brought, —
But I unto that end had gladly wrought
Heart's-blood to coin, and drained the ruddy mint
Of life, again the mellow songs to hear
That told how sunward turned her happy thought:

That sang to sleep her soul's unbodied fear,
And led her through the darkness of the year!

XVII

Alas! 't was not so written. Day by day
Her cheek grew thin, her footstep faint and slow;
And yet so fondly, with such hopeful play
Her pulses beat, they masked the coming woe.
Joy dwelt with her, and in her eager breath
His cymbals drowned the hollow drums of Death:
Life showered its promise, surer to betray,
And the false Future crumbled fast away.

XVIII

Aye, she was happy! God be thanked for this,
That she was happy! — happier than she knew,
Had even the hope that cheated her been true;
For from her face there beamed such wondrous bliss,
As cannot find fulfilment here, and dies.
God's peace and pardon touched me in her kiss,
Heaven's morning dawned and brightened in her eyes,
And o'er the Tuscan arched remoter skies!

XIX

Dazzled with light, I could not see the close
So near and dark, and every day that won
Some warmer life from the returning sun,
Took from the menaces that interpose
Between the plan and deed. I dared to dream
Her dreams, and paint them lovelier as they rose,
Till from the echoing hollows one wild stream
Sprang to proclaim the melting of the snows.

XX

Then — how she smiled! And I the casement wide
To that triumphant sound must throw, despite
The bitter air; and, soothed and satisfied,
She slept until the middle watch of night.
I watched beside her: dim the taper's light
Before the corner-shrine, — the walls in shade
Glimmered, but through the window all was white
In crystal moonshine, and the winds were laid.

XXI

And awe and shuddering fell upon my soul.
Out of the silence came, if not a sound,
The sense of sphery music, far, profound,
As Earth, revolving on her moveless pole,
Might breathe to God: and at the casement shone
Something — a radiant bird it seemed, — alone,
And beautiful, and strange: its plumes around
Played the soft fire of stars whence it had flown.

XXII

The beak of light, the eye of flame, — dispread
The hovering wings, as winnowing music out;
And richer still the glory grew about
The shadowy room, crept over Clelia's bed
And hung, a shimmering circle, round her head:
Then marked I that her eyes were wide and clear,
Nor wondered at the vision. All my fear
Fled when she spoke, and these the words she said:

XXIII

"Thou call'st, and I am ready. Ah, I see
The shining field of lilies in the moon,
So white, so fair! Yet how depart with thee,

And leave the bliss of threefold life so soon?
Peace, fainting heart! Though sweet it were to stay,
Sweet messenger, thy summons I obey:
And now the mountains part, and now the free
Wide ocean gleams beneath a golden day!

XXIV

"How still they lie, the olive-sandalled slopes,
The gardens and the towers! But floating o'er
Their shaded sleep, lo! some diviner shore,
Deep down the bright, unmeasured distance, opes
Its breathing valleys: wait for me! I haste,
But am not free: till morning let me taste
The last regret of faithful love once more,
Then shall I walk with thee yon lilied floor!"

XXV

The bright Thing fled, the moon went down the west.
Long lay she silent, sleepless; nor might I
Break with a sound the hush of ecstasy,
The strange, unearthly peace, till from his rest
The child awoke with soft, imploring cry:
Then she, with feeble hands outreaching, laid
His little cheek to hers, and softly made
His murmurs cease upon her mother-breast.

XXVI

My trance dissolved at once, and falling prone
In agony of tears, as falls a wave
With choked susurrus in some hollow cave,
Brake forth my life's lament and bitter moan.
I shook with passionate grief: I murmured: "Stay!
Have I not sworn to give thee back thine own?
False was the token, false!" She answered: "Nay,
It says, Farewell! and yonder dawns the day."

XXVII

No more! I said farewell: withdrawn afar,
Still faintly came to me, its clasping shore,
When morning drowned the wintry morning-star,
Her ebbing life; then paused — and came no more!
And blue the mocking sky, and loud the roar
Of loosened waters, leaping down the glen:
The songs of children and the shouts of men
Flouted the awful Shadow at my door!

XXVIII

And chill my heart became, a sepulchre
Sealed with the sudden ice of frozen tears:
I sat in stony calm, and looked at her,
Flown in the brightness of her beauteous years,
And not a pulse with conscious sorrow beat;
Nor, when they robed her in her winding-sheet,
Did any pang my silent bosom stir,
But pain, like bliss, seemed of the things that were.

XXIX

With cold and changeless face beside her grave
I stood, and coldly heard the shuddering sound
Of coffin echoes, smothered underground:
The tints I marked, the mournful mountains gave, —
Faces and garments of the throngs around, —
The sexton's knotted hands, the light and shade
That strangely through the moving colors played, —
So, feeling dead, Art's habit held me bound!

XXX

Yet, very slowly, Feeling's self was born
Of chance forgetfulness: when meadows took
A greener hem along the winding brook,
And buds were balmy in the fresh May-morn,
Oft would I turn, as though her step to wait;
Or ask the songless echoes why so late
Her song delayed; or from my lonely bed
At midnight start, and weep to find her fled!

XXXI

And with the pains of healing came a care
For him, her child: she had not wholly died;
And what of her lost being he might wear
Was doubly mine through all the years untried,
To love, and give me love. Him would I bear
Beyond the Alps, forth from this fatal zone,
To make his mother's land and speech his own,
And keep her beauty at his father's side!

XXXII

So forth we fared: the faithful peasant nurse
Who guarded now his life, should guard it still.
We hastened on: there seemed a brooding curse
Upon the valley. Many a brawling rill
We left behind, and many a darksome hill,
Long fens, and clay-white rivers of the plain,
Then mountains clad in thunder, — and again
Soared the high Alps, and sparkled, white and chill.

XXXIII

To seek some quiet, southward-opening vale
Beside the Adige, was my first design;
And sweetly hailed along the Brenner's line
With songs of Tyrol, welcomed by the gale
That floated from the musky slopes of vine,
With summer on its wings, I wandered down
To fix our home in some delightful town, —
But when the first we reached, there came a sign.

XXXIV

The bells were tolling, — not with nuptial joy,
But heavily, sadly: down the winding street
The pattering tumult came of children's feet,
Followed by men who bore a snow-pale boy
Upon a flowery bier. The sunshine clung,
Caressing brow and cheek, — he was so young
Even Nature felt her darling's loss, — and sweet
The burial hymn by childish mourners sung.

XXXV

"He must not see the dead!" Thus unto me
The nurse, and muffled him with trembling hand.
But something touched, in that sad harmony,
The infant's soul: he struggled and was free
A moment, saw the dead, nor could withstand
The strange desire that hungered in his eye,
And stretched his little arms, and made a cry, —
While she, in foolish terror, turned to me:

XXXVI

"Now, God have mercy, master! rest not here,
Or he will die!" 'T was but the causeless whim
Of ignorance, and yet, a formless fear

O'ercame my heart, and darkly menaced him
As with his mother's fond, foreboding dread:
Then wild with haste to lift the shadow dim
Which seemed already settling round his head,
That hour we left, and ever southward sped.

XXXVII

Past wondrous mountains, peaked with obelisks,
With pyramids and domes of dolomite
That burned vermilion in the dying light, —
Crags where the hunter with a thousand risks
The steinbok follows, — world of strength and song
Under the stars, among the fields of white,
While deep below, the broad vale winds along
Through corn and wine, secure from winter's wrong!

XXXVIII

My plan complete, the foolish servitress
Back to her dark Bohemian home I sent,
And gave my boy to one whose gentleness
Fell gentlier from her Tuscan tongue. We went
By lonely roads, where over Garda's lake
Their brows the cloven-hearted mountains bent,
To lands divine, where Como's waters make
Twin arms, to clasp them for their beauty's sake!

XXXIX

There ceased my wanderings, finding what I sought:
The charms of water, earth, and air allied, —
Secluded homes, with prospects free and wide
Around a princely world, which thither brought
Only the aspect of its holiday,
And made its emulous, unsleeping pride
Put on the yoke of Nature, and obey
Her mood of ornament, her summer play.

XL

The shapely hills, whose summits towered remote
In rosy air, might smile in soft disdain
Of palaces that strung a jewelled chain
About their feet, and far-off, seemed to float
On violet-misted waters; yet they wore
Their groves and gardens like a festal train,
And in the mirror of the crystal plain
Steep vied with steep, shore emulated shore!

XLI

Above Bellagio, on the ridge that leans
To meet, on either side, the parted blue
There is a cottage, which the olive screens
From sight of those who come the pomp to view
Of Villa Serbelloni: thrust apart
Beside a quarry whence the pile they drew, —
A home for simple needs and straitened means,
For lonely labor and a brooding heart.

XLII

Too young was I, too filled with blood and fire,
To clothe myself with ultimate despair.
Drinking with eager breast that idle air,
Color with eyes new-bathed, that could not tire,
And stung by form, and wooed by moving grace,
And warmed with beauty, should I not aspire
My misty dreams with substance to replace,
Nor ghosts beget, but an immortal race?

XLIII

Yea! rather close, as in a sainted shrine,
My life's most lovely, tender episode,
Renounce the ordination it bestowed,
And only taste its sacramental wine

In those brief Sabbaths, when the heart demands
Solemn repose and sustenance divine!
Yet lives the Artist in these restless hands,
And waiting, here, the rich material stands!

XLIV

Had I not sought, I asked myself, the far
Result, and haughtily disdained the source?
From myriad threads hangs many-stranded Force, —
Compact of gloomy atoms, burns the star!
Of earth are all foundations; and of old
On mounds of clay were lifted to their place
Shafts of eternal temples. We behold
The noble end, whereto no means are base.

XLV

I loved my work; and therefore vowed to love
All subjects, finding Art in everything, —
The angel's plumage in the bird's plain wing, —
Until such time as I might rise above
The conquered matter, to the power supreme
Which takes, rejects, adorns, — a rightful king,
Whose hand completes the subtly-hinted scheme,
And blends in equal truth the Fact and Dream!

XLVI

And now commenced a second life, wherein
Myself and Agatha and Angelo
Beheld the lonely seasons come and go,
Contented, — whether gray with hoar-frost thin
The aloes stiffened, or the passion-flower
Enriched the summer heats, or autumn shower
Rejoiced the yellow fig-leaves wide to blow: —
So still that life, we scarcely felt its flow.

XLVII

How guileless, sweet, the infancy he knew,
Loved for his own and for his mother's sake!
How fresh in sunny loveliness he grew,
Fanned by the breezes of the Larian lake.
My little Angelo, my baby-friend,
My boy, my blessing! — while for him I drew
A thousand futures, brightening to the end;
Long paths of light, with ne'er a cloudy break!

XLVIII

For, lisping in a sweeter tongue than mine,
'T was his delight around the spot to play
Where fast I wrought in unillusive day, —
Where he might chase from rock or rustling vine
The golden lizard; seek the mellow peach,
Wind-shaken; or, where spread the branchy pine
His coverture of woven shade and shine,
Sleep, lulled by murmurs of the pebbly beach.

XLIX

Along San Primo's chestnut-shaded sides,
Through fields of thyme and spiky lavender
And yellow broom, wherein the she-goat hides
Her yeanling kid, and wild bees ever stir
The drifted blossoms, — high and breezy downs, —
I led his steps, and watched his young eye glance
In brightening wonder o'er the fair expanse
Of mountain, lake, and lake-reflected towns!

L

Or, crossing to the lofty Leccan shore,
I bade him see the Fiume-latte leap

Through shivered rainbows down the hollow steep,
A meteor of the morning; high and hoar
The Alp that fed it leaned against the blue, —
But siren-voices chanted in the roar,
Enticing, mocking: shudderingly he drew
Back from the shifting whirls of endless dew.

LI

'T was otherwise, when borne in dancing bark
Across the wave, where Sommariva's walls
Flash from the starred magnolia's breathing dark,
High o'er its terraced roses, fountain-falls
And bosky laurels. In that garden he
Chirruped and fluttered like a callow lark,
With dim fore-feeling of the azure free,
Sustaining wing and strength of song-ful glee!

LII

No thing that I might paint, — a sunset cloud,
A rosy islet of the amber sky, —
A lily-branch, — the azure-emerald dye
Of neck and crest that makes the peacock proud, —
Or plume of fern, or berried ivy-braid,
Or sheen of sliding waters, — e'er could vie
With the least loveliness his form conveyed
In outline, motion, daintiest light and shade.

LIII

Not yet would I indulge the rapturous task,
The crown of labor; though my weary brain
Ached from the mimicry of Nature's mask,
And yearned for human themes. It was in vain,
My vow, that patient bondage to sustain:
Some unsubdued desire began to ask:
"How shall these soulless images be warmed?
Or Life be learned from matter uninformed?"

LIV

"Then Life!" I said: "but cautiously and slow, —
Pure human types, that, from the common base
By due degrees the spirit find its place,
And climb to passion and supernal glow
Of Heaven's beatitude. The level track
Once let me tread, nor need to stoop so low
Beneath my dreams, and thus their hope efface, —
But late, in nobler guise, receive them back."

LV

So, venturing no further, I began
The work I craved, and only what I found
In limber child, or steely-sinewed man,
Or supple maiden, drew: within that bound
Such excellence I saw, as told how much,
Despising truth, I strayed: with reverent touch
God's architecture did my pencil trace
In joint and limb, as in the godlike face.

LVI

Each part expressed its nicely-measured share
In the mysterious being of the whole:
Not from the eye or lip looked forth the soul,
But made her habitation everywhere
Within the bounds of flesh; and Art might steal,
As once, of old, her purest triumphs there.
Go see the headless Ilionëus kneel,
And thou the torso's agony shalt feel!

LVII

The blameless spirit of a lofty aim
Sees not a line that asks to be concealed

By dexterous evasion; but, revealed
As truth demands, doth Nature smite with shame
Them, who with artifice of ivy-leaf
Unsex the splendid loins, or shrink the frame
From life's pure honesty, as shrinks a thief,
While stands a hero ignorant of blame!

LVIII

What joy it was, from dead material forms,
Opaque, one-featured, and unchangeable,
To turn, and track the shifting life that warms
The shape of Man! — within whose texture dwell
Uncounted lines of beauty, tints unguessed
On luminous height, in softly-shaded dell,
And myriad postures, moving or at rest, —
All phases fair, and each, in turn, the best!

LIX

The rich ideal promise these convey,
Which in the forms of Earth can never live.
Each plastic soul has yet the power to give
A separate model to its subject clay,
And finely works its cunning likeness out:
To men a block, to me a statue lay
In each, distinct in being, draped about
With mystery, touched with Beauty's random ray!

LX

Now Fame approached, when I expected least
Her noisy greeting: 't was the olden tale.
Half-scornfully I gave; yet men increased
Their golden worth, the more I felt them fail,
My painful counterfeits of lifeless things.
"Behold!" they cried: "this wondrous artist brings
Each leaf and vein of meadow-blossoms pale,
The agate's streaks, the meal of mothy wings!"

LXI

And truly, o'er a wayside-weed they raised
A sound of marvel, found in lichen-rust
Of ancient stones a glory, stood amazed
To view a melon, gray with summer dust,
And so these rudimental labors praised,
The Tempter whispered to my flattered ear:
"Why seek the unattained, — thy fame is here!"
"Avaunt!" I cried: "in mine own soul I trust!"

LXII

A little while, I thought, and I shall know
The stamp and sentence of my destiny, —
The fateful crisis, whence my life shall be
A power, a triumph, an immortal show,
A kindling inspiration: or be classed
(As many a noble brother in the Past)
Pictor Ignotus: as it happens, so
Shall turn the fortunes of my Angelo!

LXIII

For in his childish life, expanding now,
The spirit dawned which must his future guide, —
The little prattler, with his open brow,
His clear, dark eye, his mouth too sweet for pride,
Too proud for infancy! "My boy, decide,"
I said: "wilt painter be? or rather lord
Over a marble house, a steed and sword?"
His visage flashed: he paused not, but replied:

LXIV

"Give me a marble house, as white and tall
As Sommariva's! Give me horse and hound,

A golden sword, and servants in the hall,
And thou and I be masters over all,
My father!" In that hope a joy he found,
And oft in freaks of fancied lordship made
The splendors his: ah, boy! thy wish betrayed
The blood that beats to rise, and dare not fall.

LXV

Did Clelia's spirit yearn, what time she bore
The unborn burden, for her lost estate?
Home-sick and pining, lorn and desolate
Except for love, did she, in thought, count o'er
The graceful charms of that luxurious nest
Wherefrom I stole her? Then was I unblest,
Save he inherited her pilfered fate,
And trod, for her, Pandolfo's palace-floor.

LXVI

The current of my dreams, directed thus,
Flowed ever swifter, evermore to him.
Along the coves where stripling boatmen swim
I watched him oft, like Morn's young Genius,
Dropped from her rose-cloud on the silver sand,
Her rosy breath upon each ivory limb
Kissed by the clasping waters, green and dim,
And craved the hour when he should bless my hand.

LXVII

The seasons came and went. In sun or frost
Twinkled the olive, shook the aspen bough:
In winter whiteness shone Legnone's brow,
Or cooled his fiery rocks in skyey blue
When o'er the ruffled lake the *breva* tossed
The struggling barks: their cups of snow and dew
The dark magnolias held, and purpling poured
The trampled blood from many a vineyard's hoard.

LXVIII

Five years had passed, and now the time was nigh
When on the fond result my hand must stake
Its cunning, — when the slowly-tutored eye
Must lend the heart its discipline, to make
Secure the throbbing hope, to which elate,
My long ambition clung: and, with a sigh,
"If foiled," I said, "let silence consecrate
My noteless name, and hide my ruined fate!"

LXIX

It was an autumn morn, when I addressed
Myself unto the work. A violet haze
Subdued the ardor of the golden days:
A glassy solitude was Como's breast:
Far, far away, from out the fading maze
Of mountains, blew the flickering sound of bells:
The earth lay hushed as in a Sabbath rest,
And from the air came voiceless, sweet farewells!

LXX

My choicest colors, on the palette spread,
Provoked the appetite: the canvas clear
Wooed from the easel: o'er his noble head
The faint light fell: his perfect body shed
A sunny whiteness on the atmosphere, —
All aspects gladsomely invited: yet
Across my heart there swept a wave of dread, —
The first lines trembled which my crayon set.

"FROM OUT THE FADING MAZE OF MOUNTAINS" (Page 218)

LXXI

The background, lightly sketched, revealed a wild
Storm-shadowed sweep of Ammon's desert hills,
Whose naked porphyry no dew-fed rills
Touched with descending green, but rent and piled
As thunder-split: behind them, glimmering low,
The falling sky disclosed a lurid bar:
In front, a rocky platform, where, a star
Of lonely life, I meant his form should glow.

LXXII

The God-selected child, there should he stand,
Alone and rapt, as from the world withdrawn
To seek, amid the desolated land,
His Father's counsel: in one tender hand
A cross of reed, to lightly rest upon,
The other hand a scrolled phylactery
Should, hanging, hold, — as it the seed might be
Wherefrom the living Gospel shall expand.

LXXIII

A simple theme: why, therefore, should my faith
In mine own skill forsake me? why should seem
His beauteous presence strangely like a dream, —
His shining form an unsubstantial wraith?
Was it the mother's warning, thus impressed
To stay my hand, or, working in my breast,
That dim, dread Power, that monitor supreme,
Whose mystic ways and works no Scripture saith?

LXXIV

I dropped the brush, and, to assure my heart,
Now vanquished quite, with quick, impassioned start
Caught up the boy, and kissed him o'er and o'er, —
Cheek, bosom, limbs, — and felt his pulses beat
Secure existence, till my dread, dispelled,
Became a thing to smile at: then, once more
My hand regained its craft, and followed fleet
The living lines my filmless eyes beheld.

LXXV

And won those lines, and tracked the subtle play
Where cold, keen light, without a boundary,
Through warmth, lapsed into shadow's mystic gray,
And other light within that shadow lay,
A maze of beauty, — till, outwearied, he
With drooping eyelid stood and tottering knee;
While I, withdrawn to gaze, with eager lip
Murmured my joy in mine own workmanship.

LXXVI

I clothed his limbs again, and led him out
To welcome sunshine and his glad reward,
A scarlet belt, a tiny, gilded sword, —
And long our bark, the sleeping shores about
Sped as we willed, that happy afternoon:
And sweet the evening promise (ah! too soon
It came,) of what the morrow should afford, —
An equal service and an equal boon!

LXXVII

But on the pier a messenger I found
From Milan, where the borrowed name I bore
Was known, he said, and more than half-renowned,
And now a bright occasion offered me
A fairer crown than yet my forehead wore, —

A range of palace-chambers to adorn
With sportive frescoes, nymphs of Earth and Sea,
Pursuing Hours, and marches of the Morn!

LXXVIII

It steads not now that journey to repeat,
Which flattered, toyed, but nothing sure bestowed.
When four unrestful days were sped, my feet,
With yearning shod, retraced the homeward road,
With each glad minute nearing our retreat, —
Mine eyes, when far away Bellagio showed
Beyond Tremezzo, straining to explore
Some speck of welcome on the distant shore.

LXXIX

Then came the town, the vineyards and the hill,
The cottage: soft the orange sunset shone
Upon its walls, — but everything was still,
So still and strange, my heart might well disown
The startled sense that gazed: the door ajar, —
The chambers vacant, — ashes on the stone
Where lit his torch my shy, protecting Lar, —
Dark, empty, lifeless all: I stood alone!

LXXX

As one who in an ancient forest walks
In awful midnight, when the moon is dim,
And knows not What behind, or near him, stalks,
And fears the rustling leaf, the snapping limb,
And cannot cry, and scarce can breathe, so great
The nameless Terror, — thus I sought for him,
Yet feared to find him, lest the darkest fate
Should touch my life and leave it desolate!

LXXXI

The search was vain: they both had disappeared,
My boy and Agatha, nor missed I aught
Of food, or gold, or pictures. Had she sought,
The nurse, a livelier home, and loved or feared
Too much, to leave him? Or some enemy,
Fell and implacable, this ruin brought, —
This thunder-stroke? No answer could I see,
Nor prop whereon to rest my anguished thought.

LXXXII

As casts away a drowning man his gold,
I cast the Artist from my life, and forth,
A Father only, wandered: south or north
I knew not, save the heart within me hold
Love's faithful needle, ever towards him drawn,
Felt and obeyed without the conscious will:
And first, by nestling town and purple hill,
To Garda's lake I swiftly hastened on.

LXXXIII

And thence a new, mysterious impulse led
My steps along the Adige, day by day,
To seek that village where we saw the dead, —
A fantasy wherein some madness lay;
For years had passed, and he a babe so young
That each impression with its object fled:
Not so with mine, — my roused forebodings flung
That scene to light, and there insanely clung.

LXXXIV

I found the village, but its people knew
No tidings: wearily awhile I trod
Among black crosses in the churchyard sod,

But who could guess the boy's? and why pursue
A sickly fancy? In that peopled vale
Death is not rare, alas! nor burials few,
And soon the grassy coverlet of God
Spreads equal green above their ashes pale.

LXXXV

'T was eve: upon a lonely mound I sank
That held no more its votive immortelles,
And, over-worn and half-despairing, drank
The vesper pity of the distant bells,
Till sleep or trance descended, and my brain
Forgot its echoes of eternal knells,
Effaced its ceaseless images of pain,
And, blank and helpless, knew repose again.

LXXXVI

I dreamed, — or was it dream? My Angelo
Called somewhere out of distant space: I heard,
Like faint but clearest music, every word.
"Come, father, come!" he said; "it shines like snow,
My house of marble: I've a speaking bird:
A thousand roses in my garden grow:
My fountains fall in basins dark as wine:
Come to me, father, — all is yours and mine!"

LXXXVII

And then, one fleeting moment, blew aside
The hovering mist of Sleep, and I could trace
The phantom beauty of his joyous face:
And, whitely glimmering, o'er him I espied
A marble porch of stern Palladian grace, —
Then faded all. The rest my heart supplied:
Pandolfo's palace on my vision broke:
"I come!" I cried; and with the cry awoke.

BOOK IV

THE PICTURE

I

As when a traveller, whose journey lies
In some still valley, slowly wanders on
By brook and meadow, cottage, bower, and lawn, —
Familiar sights, that charm his level eyes
For many a league, until, with late surprise
He starts to find those gentle regions gone,
And through the narrowing dell, whose crags enclose
His path, irresolutely, sadly goes:

II

For what may wait beyond, he cannot guess,
A garden or a desert, — in such wise
I went, in ignorance that mocked the guise
Of hope, and filled me with obscure distress.
Locked in a pass of doubt, whose cliffs concealed
The coming life, the temper of the skies,
I craved the certain day, that soon should rise
Upon a fortunate or fatal field!

III

The House of Life hath many chambers. He
Who deems his mansion built, a dreamer vain,
A tottering shell inhabits, and shall see
The ruthless years hurl down his masonry;

While they who plan but as they slowly gain,
Where that which was gives that which is to be
Its form and symbols, build the house divine, —
In life a temple, and in death a shrine.

IV

And following as the guiding vision led,
With briefest rest, with never-faltering feet,
By highways white, through field or chattering street
Or windy gorges of the hills I sped,
And crossed the level floors of silk and wine,
The slow canals, and, shrunken in their bed,
The sandy rivers, till the welcome line
Before me rose of Tuscan Apennine.

V

The southern slopes, with shout and festal song,
Rejoiced in vintage: as I wandered by,
Came faun-like figures, purple to the thigh
From foaming vats, and laughing women, strong
To bear their Bacchic loads: then, towards the town
Through blended toil and revel hastening down,
I saw the terrace — saw, and checked a cry, —
Whence Clelia flung to me the jasmine crown!

VI

Alas! how changed from him that wreath who wore, —
The youth all rapture, hope and sense uncloyed,
New-landed on the world's illlumined shore, —
Walked now the man! My downward path before
There sprang no arch of triumph from the void:
No censers burned: not as a conqueror
I entered Florence, — no! a slave, that fed
On one last fragment of the feast I spread.

VII

There stretched the garden-wall: the yellow sun
Above it burnished every cypress spire,
Tipped the tall laurel-clumps with points of fire,
And smote the palace-marbles till they won
The golden gleam of ages. Yet, above
That mellow splendor stood the beauty flown
Of midnights, when around it blew and shone
The breeze of Passion and the moon of Love!

VIII

At last — the door! With trembling touch I tried
The latch: it shook: the rusty bolts gave way.
As in a dream the roses I espied,
Heard as in dreams the fountain's lulling play.
There curled the dolphins in the shining shower
And rode the Triton boys: on either side
The turf was diapered with many a flower, —
And darkling drooped our green betrothal bower.

IX

Scarce had I entered, when there came a sound
Of voices from the pillared portico, —
And twofold burst a cry, as Angelo,
Across the paths, with wildly-joyous bound
Sprang to my bosom: while, as one astound
With sense of some unexpiated wrong,
The nurse entreated: "Bid thy father go!"
But "Stay!" he cried: "where hast thou been so long?"

X

"Stay, father! thou shalt paint me as thou wilt,
Each morning, in the silent northern hall;
But when, so tired, thou seest mine eyelids fall,

Then shall I take my sword with golden hilt,
And call the grooms, and bid them saddle straight
For us the two white horses in the stall — "
Here shrieked the nurse, with face of evil fate,
" Go, Signor, go ! — ah, God ! too late — too late ! "

XI

His haste dividing, him to clasp I knelt
'Twixt porch and fountain, blind with tearful joy
As on my breast his beating heart I felt,
And on my mouth the kisses of the boy,
Wherein his mother's phantom kisses poured
A stream of ancient rapture, love restored, —
When, like the lightning ere the stroke is dealt,
Before me flashed the old Marchese's sword !

XII

So haggard, sunken-eyed, convulsed with wrath
That paints a devil on the face of age,
He glared, that, quick to shield my child from scath, —
To fly the menace of unreasoning rage, —
I caught him in my cloak, and dashed apart
The tangled roses of the garden-path :
Pandolfo — hate such fatal swiftness hath —
Leapt in advance, and thrust to pierce my heart !

XIII

I saw the flame-like sparkle of the blade :
Heard, sharp and shrill, the nurse's fearful cry :
Warm blood gushed o'er my hands : a fluttering sigh
Came from the childish lips, that feebly made
These words, as prompted by the darkening eye,
" Good-night, my father ! " And I knew not why
My boy should sleep, so suddenly and so well, —
But trembling seized me : clasping him, I fell.

XIV

Nor loosed my hold, although I dimly knew
Pandolfo's hand let fall the blade accurst,
And he, his race's hoary murderer, burst
The awful stillness that around us grew,
With miserable groans : his prostrate head
Touched mine, as helpless, o'er the fading dead, —
His hands met mine, and both as gently nursed
The limbs, and strove to stay the warmth that fled.

XV

His Past, my Future, in the body met, —
His wrongs, my hopes, — the selfsame fatal blow
Dashed into darkness : blood Lethéan wet
My blighted summer, his autumnal snow,
And all of Life did either life forget,
Except the piteous death between us so,
Together pressed, involved in half-embrace,
We hung above the cold, angelic face.

XVI

" Her father, why should Heaven direct thy hand
Against her child, thy blood, chastising thee ? "
" I loved the boy " — " But couldst not pardon me,
His father ? " " Nay, but thou thyself hadst banned
Beyond forgiveness ! " " Even at *his* demand ! "
" Ah, no ! for his sweet sake might all things be,
Except to lose him." " He is lost, — and we
(Thou, too, old man !) are childless in the land ! "

XVII

Thus brokenly, scarce knowing what we said,
We clung like drowning men beneath the wave,
That nor can hurt each other, nor can save,
But breast to breast with iron arms are wed
Till Death so leaves them. Us the servants led —
Pale, awe-struck helpers — through the palace-door
And glimmering halls, to lay on Clelia's bed
The broken lily we together bore.

XVIII

God's thunder-stroke his haughty heart had bowed:
It bled with mine among the common dust
Where Rank puts on the sackcloth of the crowd,
And sits in equal woe: his guilt avowed,
And mine, there came a sad, remorseful trust,
And while the double midnight gathered there
From sable hangings and the starless air,
We held each other's hands, and wept aloud.

XIX

And he confessed, how, after weary search
And many a vain device employed, he found
By chance in Zara, on Dalmatian ground,
As altar-piece within a votive church
Some shipwrecked Plutus built, — the Mother mild
In whose foreboding face my Clelia smiled;
And thence, by slow degrees, to Como's side
Had followed home the trail I thought to hide.

XX

And there had seized me, but the boy displayed
Patrician beauty, and the failing line,
Now trembling o'er extinction, might evade
Its fate in him. This changed the first design,
And what the sordid nurse for gold betrayed
Or those Art-hucksters chattered, easy made
The rape, whose issue should, with even blow,
Revenge and compensate: but now, — ah, woe!

XXI

The issue had been reached: too dark and drear,
Too tragic, pitiful, and heart-forlorn,
Could any heart contain it, to be borne, —
And mine refused, rebelled. Behind his bier
No meek-eyed Resignation walked, or Grief
That catches sunshine in each falling tear
To build her pious rainbow: but with scorn
I thrust aside the truths that bring relief.

XXII

I spurned, though kindly, — for the old man's frame
Stumbled in Death's advancing twilight, — all
His offers: gold — the proud Pandolfan hall —
Place, that should goad the lagging feet of Fame —
And from his sombre palace, shuddering still,
Cold with remembered horror, took my name,
My own, restored; and climbed the northern hill
As one who lives, though dead his living will.

XXIII

Some habit, working in my passive feet,
Its guidance gave: the mornings came and went:
Around me spread the fields, or closed the street,

And often Night's expanded firmament
Opened above the lesser dome of Day,
And wild, tumultuous tongues of darkness sent
To vex my path, — till, in our old retreat,
I ceased to hold my reckless heart at bay!

XXIV

Some natures are there, fashioned ere their birth
For sun and spring-time and the bliss of earth,
Who only sing, achieve, and triumph, when
The Hours caress, and each bright circumstance
Leaps to its place, as in a starry dance,
To shape their story. These the fortunate men,
When Fate consents, whose lives are ever young,
And shine around whate'er they wrought or sung!

XXV

Akin to these am I, — or deemed it so
And thus beyond my present wreck beheld
No far-off rescue. All my mind, impelled
By some blind wrath that would resent the blow
Though impotent, caught action from despair,
And reached, and groped, — as when a man lets go
A jewel in the dark and seeks it where
The furzes prick him and the brambles tear.

XXVI

The clash of inconsistent qualities
No labor stayed, or beauteous passion smoothed.
But each let loose, and grasping, by degrees,
Stole sway, made chaos. Turbulent, unsoothed
By either's rule, — since order failed therein,
And hope the tidal star of restless seas, —
I turned from every height, once fair to win,
And sinned 'gainst Art the one unpardoned sin!

XXVII

For thus I reasoned: what avail my gifts,
Which but attract, provoke the spoiling Fate? —
Nor for themselves their destinies create,
But task my life; and then the thunder rifts
Their laid foundations! Why of finer nerve
The members doomed to bear more cruel weight?
Or daintier senses, if they only serve
To double pangs, already doubly great?

XXVIII

Lo! yonder hind, on whom doth Life impose
So slight a burden, finds his path prepared;
Unthinking fares as all his fathers fared,
And cheap won joys and soon-subsiding woes
Nor cleave his heart too deep, nor lift too high.
Peaceful as dew-mist from an evening sky
The years descend, until they bid him close
Upon an easy world a quiet eye!

XXIX

He sees the shell of Earth — no more: yet more
Were useless, — attributes of thankful toil;
The olive orchards, dark with ripening oil;
The misty grapes, the harvests waving near
The glossy melons, swelling from the vine;
The breezy lake, alive with darting spoil;
And dances woo from yonder purple shore,
And yonder Alps but cool his summer wine!

XXX

He lives the common life of Earth:
she grants
Result to instinct, food to appetite:
With no repressed desire his bosom
pants,
Nor that self-torturing, questioning
inward sight
Vexes his light, unconscious con-
sciousness.
He loves, and multiplies his life, — no
less
His virile pride and fatherly delight;
And all that smites me, visits him to
bless.

XXXI

If this the law, that narrower powers
enjoy
Their use, denied the greater, — nay,
are nursed
And helped, while these their energies
destroy
In baffled aspirations, crossed and
cursed
By what with brightening promise
lured them on, —
Then life is false, its purposes re-
versed,
Its luck for those who leave its veils
undrawn,
And Art the mocking glory of its
dawn!

XXXII

Not calmly, as my memory now re-
calls
The crisis, — fierce, vehemently, I
tracked
The fatal truth through every potent
fact
Of being: now in fancied carnivals
Of sense abiding, now with gloomy
face
Fronting the deeper question that ap-
palls,
Of "Wherefore Life? and what this
brawling race,
Peopling a mote of dust in endless
space?"

XXXIII

"O fools!" I cried, "O fools, a thou-
sand-fold
Tormented with your folly, seeking
good
Where Good is not, nor Evil! — words
that hold
Your natures captive, making ye the
food
And spoil of them that dare, with
vision bold,
See Nothingness! — slaves of trans-
mitted fear,
Of Power imagined, never understood,
The Demon rules you still that set you
here!"

XXXIV

The curse I would have broken bound
me still.
As flowery chains aforetime, fetters
now
Of tyrant Art subdued my wandering
will,
And made its youthful, glad, sponta-
neous vow
An iron law, whence there was no
escape.
No rest, though hopeless, would my
brain allow,
But drew the pictures of its haunting
ill,
And gave its reckless fancies hue and
shape.

XXXV

So, after many days, the cobwebbed
door
Gave sullen entrance: naught was
there displaced;
And first I turned, with pangs and
shuddering haste,
My young St. John, — I would not
see it more.
Then snatched an empty canvas from
the floor
And drew a devil: therein did I taste
Fierce joys of liberty, for what I
would
I would, — Art was itself a Devilhood!

XXXVI

This guilty joy, the holiest to de-
base, —
To use the cunning, born of pious toil,
The purest features of my dreams to
soil,
And drag in ribaldry the pencil's
grace, —
Grew by indulgence. Forms and
groups unclean

Or mocking, faster than my hand could trace
Their vivid, branding features, thrust a screen
My restless woe and dead desire between.

XXXVII

Sometimes, perchance, a grim, sarcastic freak
My pencil guided, and I stiffly drew
Byzantine saints, of flat, insipid cheek
And monstrous eye; or some Madonna meek,
With dwarfish mouth, like those of Cimabue;
Or martyr-figures, less of flesh than bone,
Lean hands, and lips forever making moan, —
A travesty of woe, distorted, weak.

XXXVIII

Or, higher ranging, touched the field that charms
Monastic painters, who, in vision warm
The Mystery grasp, and wondrous frescoes form
Where God the Father, with wide-spreading arms,
Rides on the whirlwind which His breath has made,
Or sows His judgments, Earth in darkness laid
Beneath Him, — works which only not blaspheme,
Because the faith that wrought them was supreme.

XXXIX

Thus habit grew, imagination stalked
In shameless hardihood from things profane
To sacred: nothing hindered, awed, or baulked
The appetite diseased, and such a plan
I sketched, as never since the world began —
So strange and mad — engendered any brain.
Once entertained, the lovely-loathsome guest
Clung to my fancy and my hand possessed.

XL

Not broad the canvas, but the shapes it showed,
With utmost art defined, might almost seem
To grow and spread, dilating with the theme.
Filling the space, a lurid ocean glowed
In endless billows, tipped with foam of fire,
Shoreless: but far more dreadful than a dream
Of Hell, the shapes which in that sea abode,
With sting and fang, and scaly coil and spire!

XLI

One with a lizard's sinuous motion slipped
Forth from the dun recesses of the wave,
Man-eyed and browed, but tusked and lipped
Like river-horse: its claws another drave
Within a ghastly head, whose dim eyes gave
Slow tears of blood: and with a burning tongue
In brazen jaws out-thrust, another stripped
From floating bones the flesh that round them clung!

XLII

And in the midst, suspended from above
Just o'er the blazing foam, in light intense,
A naked youth — a form of strength and love
And beauty, perfect as the artist's sense
Dreams of a god; and every glorious limb
Burned in a glow that made those billows dim.
A weird and awful brilliance, coming whence
No eye might fathom, dashed alone on him!

XLIII

Let down from Somewhere by a mighty chain
Linked round his middle, lightly, graciously

He swung, and all his body seemed to be
Compact of molten metal, such a stain
Of angry scarlet streamed and shot around:
The face convulsed, yet whether so with pain
Or awful joy, no gazers might agree,
And damp the crispy gold his brows that crowned.

XLIV

And, as he swung, all hybrid monsters near,
Dark dragon-leech, huge vermin human-faced,
Their green eyes turned on him with hideous leer,
Or stretched abhorrent tentacles, to taste
His falling ripeness. Through the picture spread
A sense of tumult, hinting to the ear
The snap and crackle of those waters red,
And hiss, and howl, and bestial noises dread.

XLV

Unweariedly I wrought, — each grim detail
As patient-perfect, as from Denner's brush,
Of hair, or mouldy hide, or pliant mail,
Or limbs, slow-parting, as the grinders crush
Their quivering fibres: good the workmanship,
Yet something unimagined seemed to fail, —
A crowning Horror, in whose iron grip
The heart should stifle, bloodless be the lip.

XLVI

This to invent, with hot, unresting mind
I labored: early sat and late, possessed
With evil images, with wicked zest
To wreak my mood, though it might curse my kind,
On Evil's purest type, and horridest;
And never young ambition heretofore
In noble service so itself outwore.
What thus we seek, or soon or late we find.

XLVII

One morn of winter, when unmelted frost,
Beneath a low-hung vault of moveless cloud,
Silvered the world, even while my head was bowed
In half-despair, my brain the Horror crossed,
Unheralded; and never human will
Achieved such fearful triumph! Never came
The form of that which language cannot name,
So armed the life of souls to crush and kill!

XLVIII

And this be never unto men revealed,
To curse by mere existence! Knowledge taints,
Drawn from such crypts, the whitest robes of saints;
Though faith be firm, and warrior-virtue steeled
Against assault, the Possible breaks in
Their borders, and the soul that cannot yield
Must needs receive the images it paints,
And shudder, sinless, in the air of Sin!

XLIX

My blood runs chill, remembering now the laugh
Wherewith, enlightened, I the pencil seized, —
Half deadly-smitten, fascinated half,
Yet sworn to do the dreadful thing I pleased!
All things upheld my mood with evil guise:
The palette-colors, to my sense diseased,
Winked wickedly, like devils' slimy eyes,
And darkness closed me from the drooping skies!

L

As when a harp-string in a silent room
At midnight snaps, with weird, melodious twang,
So suddenly, through inner, outer gloom
A sweet, sharp sound, vibrating slowly, rang

And sank to humming music; while a stream
Of gathering odor followed, as in dream
We braid the bliss of music and perfume, —
And pierced, I sat, with some divinest pang.

LI

And, as from sound and fragrance born, a glow
All rosy-golden, fair as Alpine snow
At sunset, grew, — mist-like at first, and dim,
But brightening, folding inwards, fold on fold,
Until my ravished vision could behold
Complete, each line of sunny-shining limb
And sainted head, soft-posed as I had drawn
My boy — my Angelo — my young St. John!

LII

O beauteous ghost! O sacred loveliness!
Unworthy I to look upon thy face,
Unworthy thy transfigured form to trace,
That stood, expectant, waiting but to bless
By miracle, where I intended crime!
The folded scroll, the shadowy cross of reed
He bore, — St. John, but not of mortal seed:
So God beheld him, in that early time!

LIII

Dew came to burning eyes: a heavenly rain,
A balmy deluge, bathed my arid heart,
And washed that hateful fabric of the brain
To rot, a ruin, in some Hell of Art.
A sweet, unquestioning, obedient mood
Made swift revulsion from the broken strain
Of my revolt; and still the Phantom wooed,
As bright, and wonderful, and mute, it stood.

LIV

Yet I, through all dissolving, trembling deeps
Of consciousness, his angel-errand knew.
The guilty picture fell, and forth I drew
My dim St. John from out the dusty heaps,
And cleansed it first, and kissed in reverence
The shadowy lips, — fresh colors took, and true,
And painted, while on each awakened sense
The awful beauty of the Phantom grew.

LV

All hoarded craft, all purposes and powers
Together worked: the scattered gleams of thought
As through a glass my heart together brought
To light my hand: the chariots of the Hours
For me were stayed: I knew not Earth nor Time,
But painted nimbly in a trance sublime,
And tint by tint my charmèd pencil caught,
And line by line, the loveliness it sought.

LVI

Mine eyes were purged from film: I saw and fixed
The subtle secrets, not with old despair
But with undoubting faith my colors mixed,
And with unfaltering hand the breeze-blown hair,
The dark, unfathomed eyes, the lips of youth,
The dainty, fleeting grace that stands betwixt
The babe and child, in members pure and bare,
Portrayed, with joy that owned my pencil's truth.

LVII

And he, my heavenly model! how he shone,
Unwearied, silent, — drawn, a golden form,

Against the background of a sky of storm,
On Ammon's desert hills ! The landscape lone
Through all its savage slopes and gorges smiled,
Him to enframe, the God-selected child,
And o'er the shadowy distance fell a gleam
That touched with promised peace its barren dream.

LVIII

At last, the saffron clearness of the west,
From under clouds, shot forth elegiac ray
That sang the burial of the wondrous day :
And sad, mysterious music in my breast,
As at the coming, now the close expressed.
Ah, God ! I dared not watch him float away,
But, seized and shaken by the fading spell,
And covering up my face, exhausted fell.

LIX

There, when my beating heart no longer shook
The sense that listened, though that music died,
A solemn Presence lingered at my side ;
And drop by drop, as forms an infant brook
Within a woodland hollow, soft, unheard,
And out of nothing braids its slender tide,
The sense of speech the living silence stirred
And wordless sound became melodious word !

LX

"O weak of will !" (so spake what seemed a voice)
"And slave of sense, that, hovering in extremes,
Dost oversoar, and undermine thy dreams,
Behold the lowest, highest ! Make thy choice, —
Lord of the vile or servant of the pure:
Be free, range all that is, if better seems
Freedom to smite thyself, than to endure
The pain that worketh thine immortal cure !

LXI

"Lo ! never any living brain knew peace,
That saw not, rooted in the scheme of things,
Assailing and protecting Evil ! Cease
To beat this steadfast law with bleeding wings,
For know, that never any living brain,
Which rested not within its ordered plane,
Restrung the harp of life with sweeter strings,
Or made new melodies, except of pain !

LXII

"Where wast thou, when the world's foundations first
Were laid ? Didst thou the azure tent unfold ?
Or bid the young May-morning's car of gold
Herald the seasons ? Wouldst thou see reversed
The sacred order ? Why, if life be cursed,
Add to its curses thy rebellion bold ?
Or has thy finer wisdom only yearned
For thankless gifts and recompense unearned ?

LXIII

"Come, thou hast questioned God : I question thee.
And truly thou art smitten, — yet repress
Thine old impatience : calm the eyes that see
How blows give strength, and sharpest sorrows bless.
Free art thou : is thy liberty so fair
To hide the ghost of vanished happiness,

And sleep'st thou sweeter under skies, so bare
These thunder-strokes were welcome to its air?

LXIV

"Why is thy life so sorely smitten? Wait,
And thou shalt learn! Dead stones thy teachers were:
Through years of toil thy hand did minister
To joyous Art: thou wast content with Fate.
Take now thy ruined passion, fix its date,
Peruse its growth, and, if thou canst replan
The blended facts of Life that made thee man; —
Could aught be spared, or changed for other state?

LXV

"Not less thy breathing bliss than yonder hind
Thou enviest, but more: therein it lies,
That each experience brings a twin surprise,
As mirrored in the glad, creative mind,
And in the beating heart. Behold! he bows
To adverse circumstance, to change and death;
But thou wouldst place thy fortune his beneath,
Shaming the double glory on thy brows!

LXVI

"His pangs outworn, perchance some feeling lives
For those of others: thine the lordly power
Transmuting all that loss or suffering gives
To Beauty! Even thy most despairing hour
Some darker grace informs, and like a bee
Thine Art sits hoarding in thy Passion's flower:
So vast thy need, no phase thine eye can see
Of Earth or Life, that not enriches thee!

LXVII

"Such is the Artist, — drawing precious use
From every fate, and so by laws divine
Encompassed, that in glad obedience shine
His works the fairer: his the flag of truce
Between the warring worlds of soul and sense:
By neither mastered, holding both apart,
Or blending in a newer excellence,
He weds the haughty brain and yearning heart.

LXVIII

"Beneath tempestuous, shifting movement laid,
The base of steadfast Order he beholds,
And from the central vortex, unafraid,
Marks how all action evermore unfolds
Forth from a point of absolute repose,
Which hints of God; and how, in gleams betrayed,
The Perfect even in imperfection shows, —
And Earth a bud, but breathing of the rose!"

LXIX

Even as the last stroke of a Sabbath bell,
Heard in the Sabbath silence of a dell,
Sounds on and on, with fainter, thinner note,
Distincter ever, till its dying swell
Draws after it the listener's ear, to float
Farther and farther into skies remote, —
So, when what seemed a voice had ceased, the strain
Drew after it the waiting, listening brain.

LXX

And, following far, my senses on the track
Slid into darkness. Dead to life, I lay
Plunged in oblivious slumber, still and black,
All through the night and deep into the day:
Yet was it sleep, not trance, — restoring Sleep,

That from the restless soul its house of clay
Protects, and when I woke, her dew so deep
Had drenched, the wondrous Past was washed away.

LXXI

But there, before me, its recorded gift
Flashed from the easel, so divinely bright
It shamed the morning: then, returning swift,
The wave of Memory rolled, and pure delight
Filled mine awakening spirit, and I wept
With contrite heart, redeemed, enfranchised quite:
My sick revolt was healed, — the Demon slept,
And God was good, and Earth her promise kept.

LXXII

I wandered forth; and lo! the halcyon world
Of sleeping wave, and velvet-folded hill,
And stainless air and sunshine, lay so still!
No mote of vapor on the mountains curled;
But lucid, gem-like, blissful, as if sin
Or more than gentlest grief had never been,
Each lovely thing, of tint that shone impearled,
As dwelt some dim beatitude therein!

LXXIII

There, as I stood, the contadini came
With anxious, kindly faces, seeking me;
And caught my hands, and called me by my name,
As one from danger snatched might welcomed be.
Such had they feared, their gentle greeting told, —
Seeing the cottage shut, the chimney free
Of that blue household breath, whose rings, unrolled,
The sign of home, the life of landscape, hold.

LXXIV

So God's benignant hand directing wrought,
And Man and Nature took me back to life.
My cry was hushed: the forms of child and wife
Smiled from a solemn, moonlit land of thought,
A realm of peaceful sadness. Sad, yet strong,
My soul stood up, threw off its robes of strife,
And quired anew the world-old human song, —
Accepting patience and forgetting wrong!

LXXV

Erelong, my living joy in Art returned,
But reverently felt, and purified
By recognition of the bounty spurned,
And meek acceptance in the place of pride.
Yet nevermore should brush of mine be drawn
O'er the unfinished picture of St. John:
What from the lovely miracle I learned,
The lines of colder toil should never hide.

LXXVI

Though incomplete, it gave the prophecy
Of far-off power, whereto my patient mind
Must set its purpose, — saying unto me:
"Make sure the gift, the fleeting fortune bind, —
What once a moment was, may ever be!"
And when, in time, this hope securer grew,
Unto the picture, whence my truth I drew,
A sacred dedication I assigned.

LXXVII

Pandolfo dead, the body of my child
Upon his mother's lonely breast I laid,
A late return; and o'er their ashes made

A chapel, in the green Bohemian wild,
For weary toil, pure thought, and silent prayer, —
A simple shrine, of all adornment bare,
Save o'er the altar, where, completed now,
St. John looks down, with Heaven upon his brow!

LXXVIII

The Past accepts no sacrifice: its gates
Alike atonement and revenge outbar.
We take its color, yet our spirits are
Thrust forward by a power which antedates
Their own: the hand of Art outreaches Fate's,
And lifts the bright, unrisen, refracted star
Above our dark horizon, showing thus
A future to the faith that fades in us.

LXXIX

Not with that vanity of shallow minds
Which apes the speech, and shames the noble truth
Of them whose pride is knowledge, — nor of Youth
The dazzling, dear mirage, that never finds
Itself o'ertaken, — but with trust in fame,
As knowing fame, and owning now the pure
And humble will which makes achievement sure,
I, Egon, here the Artist's title claim!

LXXX

The forms of Earth, the masks of Life, I see,
Yet see wherein they fail: with eager eyes
I hunt the wandering gleams of harmony,
The rarer apparitions which surprise
With hints of Beauty, fixing these alone
In wedded grace of form and tint and tone,
That so the thing, transfigured, shall arise
Beyond itself, and truly live in me.

LXXXI

And I shall paint, discerning where the line
Wavers between the Human and Divine, —
Nor to the Real in servile bondage bound,
Nor scorning it: nor with supernal themes
Feeding the moods of o'er-aspiring dreams,
(For mortal triumph is a god uncrowned,) —
But by Proportion ruled, and by Repose,
And by the Soul supreme whence they arose.

LXXXII

Not clamoring for over-human bliss,
Yet now no more unhappy, — not elate
As one exalted o'er the level state
Of these ungifted lives, yet strong in this,
That I the sharpest stab and sweetest kiss
Have tasted, suffered, — I can stand and wait,
Serene in knowledge, in obedience free,
The only master of my destiny!

LXXXIII

And thus as in a clear, revealing noon
I live. So comes, sometimes, a mountain day:
A vague, uncertain, misty morn, and soon
Sharp-smiting sun, and winds' and lightning's play, —
A drear confusion, by the final crash
Dispersed, and ere meridian blown away;
And all the peaks shine bare, the waters flash,
And Earth lies open to the golden ray!

LXXXIV

Lonely, perchance, but as these dark-browed hills
Are lonely, belted round with broader spheres
Of bluer world, my life its peace fulfils
In poise of soul: the long, laborious years

Await me: closed my holy task, I go
To reaccept, beyond the Alpine snow,
The gage of glorious battle with my peers, —
Not each of each, but of false art, the foe.

LXXXV

Once more, O lovely, piteous, shaping Past,
I kiss thy lips: now let thy face be hid,
And this green turf above thy coffin-lid
Be turned to violets! The forests cast
Their shadowy arms across the quiet vale,
And all sweet sounds the coming rest foretell,
And earth takes glory as the sky grows pale,
So fond and beautiful the Day's farewell!

LXXXVI

Farewell, then, thou embosomed isle of peace
In restless waters! Let the years increase
With unexpected blessing: thou shalt lie
As in her crystal shell the maiden lay,
Watched o'er by weeping dwarfs, — too fair to die,
Yet charmed from life: and there may come a day
Which crowns Desire with gift, and Art with truth,
And Love with bliss, and Life with wiser youth!

HOME BALLADS

HOME BALLADS

THE QUAKER WIDOW

I

THEE finds me in the garden, Hannah, — come in! 'T is kind of thee
To wait until the Friends were gone, who came to comfort me.
The still and quiet company a peace may give, indeed,
But blessed is the single heart that comes to us at need.

II

Come, sit thee down! Here is the bench where Benjamin would sit
On First-day afternoons in spring, and watch the swallows flit:
He loved to smell the sprouting box, and hear the pleasant bees
Go humming round the lilacs and through the apple-trees.

III

I think he loved the spring: not that he cared for flowers: most men
Think such things foolishness, — but we were first acquainted then,
One spring: the next he spoke his mind; the third I was his wife,
And in the spring (it happened so) our children entered life.

IV

He was but seventy-five: I did not think to lay him yet
In Kennett graveyard, where at Monthly Meeting first we met.
The Father's mercy shows in this: 't is better I should be
Picked out to bear the heavy cross — alone in age — than he.

V

We 've lived together fifty years: it seems but one long day,
One quiet Sabbath of the heart, till he was called away;
And as we bring from Meeting-time a sweet contentment home,
So, Hannah, I have store of peace for all the days to come.

VI

I mind (for I can tell thee now) how hard it was to know
If I had heard the spirit right, that told me I should go;
For father had a deep concern upon his mind that day,
But mother spoke for Benjamin, — she knew what best to say.

VII

Then she was still: they sat awhile: at last she spoke again,
"The Lord incline thee to the right!" and "Thou shalt have him, Jane!"
My father said. I cried. Indeed, 't was not the least of shocks,
For Benjamin was Hicksite, and father Orthodox.

VIII

I thought of this ten years ago, when daughter Ruth we lost:
Her husband 's of the world, and yet I could not see her crossed.

She wears, thee knows, the gayest gowns, she hears a hireling priest —
Ah, dear! the cross was ours: her life 's a happy one, at least.

IX

Perhaps she 'll wear a plainer dress when she 's as old as I, —
Would thee believe it, Hannah? once *I* felt temptation nigh!
My wedding-gown was ashen silk, too simple for my taste:
I wanted lace around the neck, and a ribbon at the waist.

X

How strange it seemed to sit with him upon the women's side!
I did not dare to lift my eyes: I felt more fear than pride,
Till, "in the presence of the Lord," he said, and then there came
A holy strength upon my heart, and I could say the same.

XI

I used to blush when he came near, but then I showed no sign;
With all the meeting looking on, I held his hand in mine.
It seemed my bashfulness was gone, now I was his for life:
Thee knows the feeling, Hannah, — thee, too, hast been a wife.

XII

As home we rode, I saw no fields look half so green as ours;
The woods were coming into leaf, the meadows full of flowers;
The neighbors met us in the lane, and every face was kind, —
'T is strange how lively everything comes back upon my mind.

XIII

I see, as plain as thee sits there, the wedding-dinner spread:
At our own table we were guests, with father at the head,
And Dinah Passmore helped us both, — 't was she stood up with me,
And Abner Jones with Benjamin, — and now they 're gone, all three!

XIV

It is not right to wish for death; the Lord disposes best.
His Spirit comes to quiet hearts, and fits them for His rest;
And that He halved our little flock was merciful, I see:
For Benjamin has two in heaven, and two are left with me.

XV

Eusebius never cared to farm, — 't was not his call, in truth,
And I must rent the dear old place, and go to daughter Ruth.
Thee'll say her ways are not like mine, — young people now-a-days
Have fallen sadly off, I think, from all the good old ways.

XVI

But Ruth is still a Friend at heart; she keeps the simple tongue,
The cheerful, kindly nature we loved when she was young;
And it was brought upon my mind, remembering her, of late,
That we on dress and outward things perhaps lay too much weight.

XVII

I once heard Jesse Kersey say, a spirit clothed with grace,
And pure, almost, as angels are, may have a homely face.
And dress may be of less account: the Lord will look within:
The soul it is that testifies of righteousness or sin.

XVIII

Thee must n't be too hard on Ruth: she 's anxious I should go,
And she will do her duty as a daughter should, I know.
'T is hard to change so late in life, but we must be resigned:
The Lord looks down contentedly upon a willing mind.

1860.

THE HOLLY-TREE

I

The corn was warm in the ground, the fences were mended and made,
And the garden-beds, as smooth as a counterpane is laid,
Were dotted and striped with green where the peas and radishes grew,
With elecampane at the foot, and comfrey, and sage, and rue.

II

The work was done on the farm, 't was orderly everywhere,
And comfort smiled from the earth, and rest was felt in the air.
When a Saturday afternoon at such a time comes round,
The farmer's fancies grow, as grows the grain in his ground.

III

'T was so with Gabriel Parke: he stood by the holly-tree
That came, in the time of Penn, with his fathers over the sea:
A hundred and eighty years it had grown where it first was set,
And the thorny leaves were thick and the trunk was sturdy yet.

IV

From the knoll where stood the house the fair fields pleasantly rolled
To dells where the laurels hung, and meadows of buttercup gold:
He looked on them all by turns, with joy in his acres free,
But ever his thoughts came back to the tale of the holly-tree.

V

In beautiful Warwickshire, beside the Avon stream,
John Parke, in his English home, had dreamed a singular dream.
He went with a sorrowful heart, for love of a bashful maid,
And a vision came as he slept one day in a holly's shade.

VI

An angel sat in the boughs, and showed him a goodly land,
With hills that fell to a brook, and forests on either hand,
And said: "Thou shalt wed thy love, and this shall belong to you;
For the earth has ever a home for a tender heart and true!"

VII

Even so it came to pass, as the angel promised then:
He wedded and wandered forth with the earliest friends of Penn,
And the home foreshown he found, with all that a home endears, —
A nest of plenty and peace, for a hundred and eighty years!

VIII

In beautiful Warwickshire the life of the two began, —
A slip of the tree of the dream, a far-off sire of the man;

And it seemed to Gabriel Parke, as the leaves above him stirred,
That the secret dream of his heart the soul of the holly heard.

IX

Of Patience Phillips he thought: she, too, was a bashful maid:
The blue of her eyes was hid by the eyelash's golden shade;
But well that she could not hide the cheeks that were fair to see
As the pink of an apple-bud, ere the blossom snows the tree!

X

Ah! how had the English Parke to the English girl betrayed,
Save a dream had helped his heart, the love that makes afraid?—
That seemed to smother his voice, when his blood so sweetly ran,
And the baby heart lay weak in the rugged breast of the man?

XI

His glance came back from the hills and back from the laurel glen,
And fell on the grass at his feet, where clucked a mother-hen,
With a brood of tottering chicks, that followed as best they might;
But one was trodden and lame, and drooped in a woful plight.

XII

He lifted up from the grass the feeble, chittering thing,
And warmed its breast at his lips, and smoothed its stumpy wing,
When, lo! at his side a voice: "Is it hurt?" was all she said;
But the eyes of both were shy, and the cheeks of both were red.

XIII

She took from his hand the chick, and fondled and soothed it then,
While, knowing that good was meant, cheerfully clucked the hen;
And the tongues of the two were loosed: there seemed a wonderful charm
In talk of the hatching fowls and spring-work done on the farm.

XIV

But Gabriel saw that her eyes were drawn to the holly-tree:
"Have you heard," he said, "how it came with the family over the sea?"
He told the story again, though he knew she knew it well,
And a spark of hope, as he spake, like fire in his bosom fell.

XV

"I dreamed a beautiful dream, here, under the tree, just now,"
He said; and Patience felt the warmth of his eyes on her brow:
"I dreamed, like the English Parke; already the farm I own,
But the rest of the dream is best — the land is little, alone."

XVI

He paused, and looked at the maid: her flushing cheek was bent,
And, under her chin, the chick was cheeping its warm content;
But naught she answered — then he: "O Patience! I thought of you!
Tell me you take the dream, and help me to make it true!"

XVII

The mother looked from the house, concealed by the window-pane,
And she felt that the holly's spell had fallen upon the twain;
She guessed from Gabriel's face what the words he had spoken were,
And blushed in the maiden's stead, as if they were spoken to her.

"THE MOTHER LOOKED FROM THE HOUSE" (Page 240)

XVIII

She blushed, and she turned away, ere the trembling man and maid
Silently hand in hand had kissed in the holly's shade,
And Patience whispered at last, her sweet eyes dim with dew:
"O Gabriel! *could* you dream as much as I've dreamed of you?"

XIX

The mother said to herself, as she sat in her straight old chair:
"He's got the pick of the flock, so tidy and kind and fair!
At first I shall find it hard, to sit and be still, and see
How the house is kept to rights by somebody else than me.

XX

"But the home must be theirs alone: I'll do by her, if I can,
As Gabriel's grandmother did, when I as a wife began:
So good and faithful he's been, from the hour when I gave him life,
He shall master be in the house, and mistress shall be his wife!"

1869.

JOHN REED

THERE 's a mist on the meadow below; the herring-frogs chirp and cry;
It 's chill when the sun is down, and the sod is not yet dry:
The world is a lonely place, it seems, and I don't know why.

I see, as I lean on the fence, how wearily trudges Dan
With the feel of the spring in his bones, like a weak and elderly man;
I've had it a many a time, but we must work when we can.

But day after day to toil, and ever from sun to sun,
Though up to the season's front and nothing be left undone,
Is ending at twelve like a clock, and beginning again at one.

The frogs make a sorrowful noise, and yet it 's the time they mate;
There 's something comes with the spring, a lightness or else a weight;
There 's something comes with the spring, and it seems to me it 's fate.

It 's the hankering after a life that you never have learned to know;
It 's the discontent with a life that is always thus and so;
It 's the wondering what we are, and where we are going to go.

My life is lucky enough, I fancy, to most men's eyes,
For the more a family grows, the oftener some one dies,
And it 's now run on so long, it could n't be otherwise.

And Sister Jane and myself, we have learned to claim and yield;
She rules in the house at will, and I in the barn and field,
So, nigh upon thirty years! — as if written and signed and sealed.

I could n't change if I would; I 've lost the how and the when;
One day my time will be up, and Jane be the mistress then,
For single women are tough, and live down the single men.

She kept me so to herself, she was always the stronger hand,
And my lot showed well enough, when I looked around in the land;
But I 'm tired and sore at heart, and I don't quite understand.

I wonder how it had been if I 'd taken what others need,
The plague, they say, of a wife, the care of a younger breed ?
If Edith Pleasanton now were with me as Edith Reed ?

Suppose that a son well grown were there in the place of Dan,
And I felt myself in him, as I was when my work began ?
I should feel no older, sure, and certainly more a man !

A daughter, besides, in the house ; nay, let there be two or three !
We never can overdo the luck that can never be,
And what has come to the most might also have come to me.

I 've thought, when a neighbor's wife or his child was carried away,
That to have no loss was a gain ; but now, — I can hardly say ;
He seems to possess them still, under the ridges of clay.

And share and share in a life is, somehow, a different thing
From property held by deed, and the riches that oft take wing ;
I feel so close in the breast ! — I think it must be the spring.

I 'm drying up like a brook when the woods have been cleared around ;
You 're sure it must always run, you are used to the sight and sound,
But it shrinks till there 's only left a stony rut in the ground.

There 's nothing to do but take the days as they come and go,
And not to worry with thoughts that nobody likes to show,
For people so seldom talk of the things they want to know.

There 's times when the way is plain, and everything nearly right,
And then, of a sudden, you stand like a man with a clouded sight :
A bush seems often a beast, in the dusk of the falling night.

I must move ; my joints are stiff ; the weather is breeding rain,
And Dan is hurrying on with his plough-team up the lane.
I 'll go to the village-store ; I 'd rather not talk with Jane.

1872.

JANE REED

"If I could forget," she said, "forget, and begin again !
We see so dull at the time, and, looking back, so plain :
There 's a quiet that 's worse, I think, than many a spoken strife,
And it 's wrong that one mistake should change the whole of a life.

"There 's John, forever the same, so steady, sober, and mild ;
He never storms as a man who never cried as a child :
Perhaps my ways are harsh, but if he would seem to care,
There 'd be fewer swallowed words and a lighter load to bear.

"Here, Cherry ! — she 's found me out, the calf I raised in the spring,
And a likely heifer she 's grown, the foolish, soft-eyed thing !
Just the even color I like, without a dapple or speck, —
O Cherry, bend down your head, and let me cry on your neck !

"The poor dumb beast she is, she never can know nor tell,
And it seems to do me good, the very shame of the spell:
So old a woman and hard, and Joel so old a man. —
But the thoughts of the old go on as the thoughts of the young began!

"It's guessing that wastes the heart, far worse than the surest fate:
If I knew he had thought of me, I could quietly work and wait;
And then when either, at last, on a bed of death should lie,
Why, one might speak the truth, and the other hear and die!"

She leaned on the heifer's neck; the dry leaves fell from the boughs,
And over the sweet late grass of the meadow strayed the cows:
The golden dodder meshed the cardinal-flower by the rill;
There was autumn haze in the air, and sunlight low on the hill.

"I've somehow missed my time," she said to herself and sighed:
"What girls are free to hope, a steady woman must hide,
But the need outstays the chance: it makes me cry and laugh,
To think that the only thing I can talk to now is a calf!"

A step came down from the hill: she did not turn or rise;
There was something in her heart that saw without the eyes.
She heard the foot delay, as doubting to stay or go:
"Is the heifer for sale?" he said. She sternly answered, "No!"

She lifted her head as she spoke: their eyes a moment met,
And her heart repeated the words, "If I could only forget!"
He turned a little away, but her lowered eyes could see
His hand, as it picked the bark from the trunk of a hickory-tree.

"Why can't we be friendly, Jane?" his words came, strange and slow;
"You seem to bear me a grudge, so long, and so long ago!
You were gay and free with the rest, but always so shy of me,
That, before my freedom came, I saw that it could n't be."

"Joel!" was all she cried, as their glances met again,
And a sudden rose effaced her pallor of age and pain.
He picked at the hickory bark: "It's a curious thing to say;
But I'm lonely since Phœbe died and the girls are married away.

"That's why these thoughts come back: I'm a little too old for pride,
And I never could understand how love should be all one side:
'T would answer itself, I thought, and time would show me how;
But it did n't come so, then, and it does n't seem so, now!"

"Joel, it came so, then!" — and her voice was thick with tears:
"A hope for a single day, and a bitter shame for years!"
He snapped the ribbon of bark; he turned from the hickory-tree:
"Jane, look me once in the face, and say that you thought of me!"

She looked, and feebly laughed: "It's a comfort to know the truth,
Though the chance was thrown away in the blind mistake of youth."
"And a greater comfort, Jane," he said, with a tender smile,
"To find the chance you have lost, and keep it a little while."

She rose as he spake the words : the petted heifer thrust
Her muzzle between the twain, with an animal's strange mistrust :
But over the creature's neck he drew her to his breast :
"A horse is never so old but it pulls with another best!"

"It's enough to know," she said; "to remember, not forget!"
"Nay, nay : for the rest of life we'll pay each other's debt!"
She had no will to resist, so kindly was she drawn,
And she sadly said, at last, "But what will become of John?"

1876.

THE OLD PENNSYLVANIA FARMER

I

WELL — well! this is a comfort, now — the air is mild as May,
And yet 't is March the twentieth, or twenty-first, to-day :
And Reuben ploughs the hill for corn ; I thought it would be tough,
But now I see the furrows turned, I guess it 's dry enough.

II

I don't half live, penned up in-doors ; a stove 's not like the sun.
When I can't see how things go on, I fear they 're badly done :
I might have farmed till now, I think — one's family is so queer —
As if a man can't oversee who 's in his eightieth year !

III

Father, I mind, was eighty-five before he gave up his;
But he was dim o' sight, and crippled with the rheumatiz.
I followed in the old, steady way, so he was satisfied ;
But Reuben likes new-fangled things and ways I can't abide.

IV

I 'm glad I built this southern porch ; my chair seems easier here :
I have n't seen as fine a spring this five-and-twenty year !
And how the time goes round so quick! — a week, I would have sworn
Since they were husking on the flat, and now they plough for corn !

V

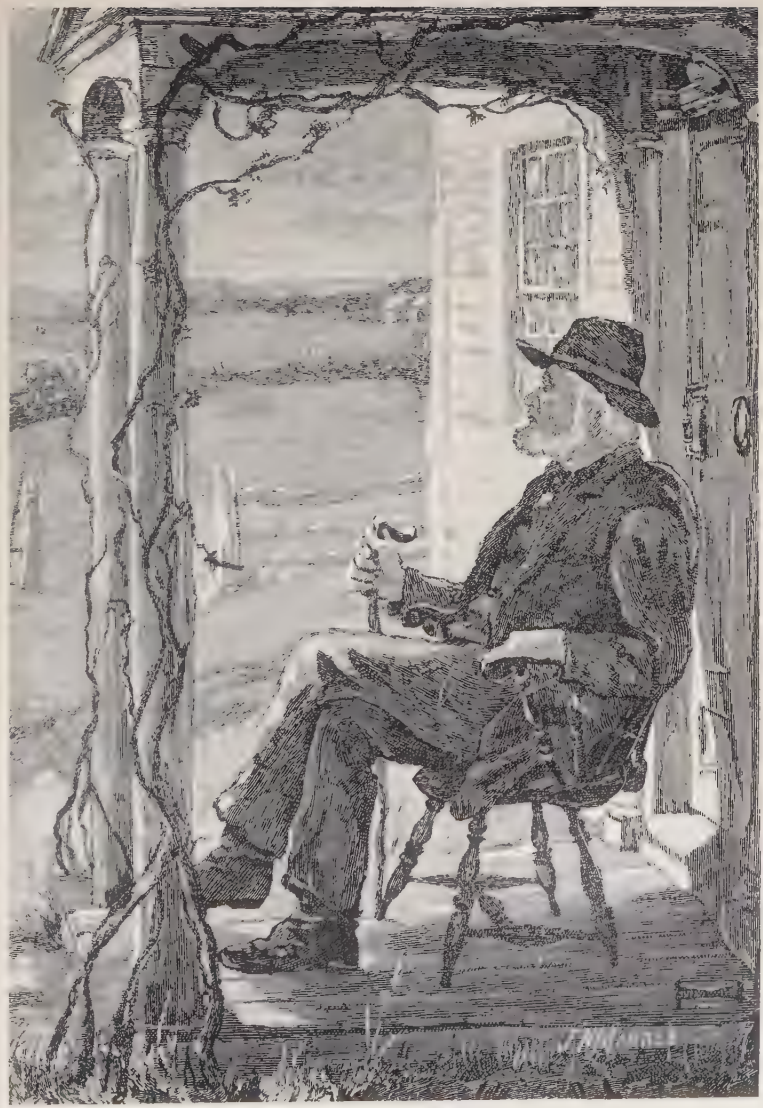
When I was young, time had for me a lazy ox's pace,
But now it 's like a blooded horse, that means to win the race.
And yet I can't fill out my days, I tire myself with naught ;
I 'd rather use my legs and hands than plague my head with thought.

VI

There 's Marshall, too, I see from here : he and his boys begin.
Why don't they take the lower field ? that one is poor and thin.
A coat of lime it ought to have, but they 're a doless set :
They think swamp-mud 's as good, but we shall see what corn they get!

VII

Across the level, Brown's new place begins to make a show ;
I thought he 'd have to wait for trees, but, bless me, how they grow !
They say it 's fine — two acres filled with evergreens and things ;
But so much land ! it worries me, for not a cent it brings.



"I'M GLAD I BUILT THIS SOUTHERN PORCH" (Page 244)

VIII

He has the right, I don't deny, to please himself that way,
But 't is a bad example set, and leads young folks astray :
Book-learning gets the upper-hand and work is slow and slack,
And they that come long after us will find things gone to wrack.

IX

Now Reuben 's on the hither side, his team comes back again ;
I know how deep he sets the share, I see the horses strain :
I had that field so clean of stones, but he must plough so deep,
He 'll have it like a turnpike soon, and scarcely fit for sheep.

X

If father lived, I 'd like to know what he would say to these
New notions of the younger men, who farm by chemistries :
There 's different stock and other grass; there 's patent plough and cart—
Five hundred dollars for a bull! it would have broke his heart.

XI

The maples must be putting out: I see a something red
Down yonder where the clearing laps across the meadow's head.
Swamp-cabbage grows beside the run ; the green is good to see,
But wheat 's the color, after all, that cheers and 'livens me.

XII

They think I have an easy time, no need to worry now —
Sit in the porch all day and watch them mow, and sow, and plough :
Sleep in the summer in the shade, in winter in the sun —
I 'd rather do the thing myself, and know just how it 's done !

XIII

Well — I suppose I 'm old, and yet 't is not so long ago
When Reuben spread the swath to dry, and Jesse learned to mow,
And William raked, and Israel hoed, and Joseph pitched with me :
But such a man as I was then my boys will never be!

XIV

I don't mind William's hankering for lectures and for books;
He never had a farming knack — you 'd see it in his looks ;
But handsome is that handsome does, and he is well to do:
'T would ease my mind if I could say the same of Jesse, too.

XV

There 's one black sheep in every flock, so there must be in mine,
But I was wrong that second time his bond to undersign :
It 's less than what his share will be — but there 's the interest!
In ten years more I might have had two thousand to invest.

XVI

There 's no use thinking of it now, and yet it makes me sore ;
The way I 've slaved and saved, I ought to count a little more.
I never lost a foot of land, and that 's a comfort, sure,
And if they do not call me rich, they cannot call me poor.

XVII

Well, well! ten thousand times I 've thought the things I 'm thinking now;
I 've thought them in the harvest-field and in the clover-mow;
And often I get tired of them, and wish I 'd something new —
But this is all I 've had and known; so what 's a man to do?

XVIII

'T is like my time is nearly out, of that I 'm not afraid;
I never cheated any man, and all my debts are paid.
They call it rest that we shall have, but work would do no harm;
There can't be rivers there and fields, without some sort o' farm!

1869.

HOME PASTORALS

AD AMICOS

MOUNT CUBA, OCTOBER 10, 1874.

Sometimes an hour of Fate's serenest weather
Strikes through our changeful sky its coming beams;
Somewhere above us, in elusive ether,
Waits the fulfilment of our dearest dreams.

So, when the wayward time and gift have blended,
When hope beholds relinquished visions won,
The heavens are broken and a blue more splendid
Holds in its bosom an enchanted sun.

Then words unguessed, in faith's own shyness guarded,
To ears unused their welcome music bear:
Then hands help on that doubtingly retarded,
And love is liberal as the Summer air.

The thorny chaplet of a slow probation
Becomes the laurel Fate so long denied;
The form achieved smiles on the aspiration,
And dream is deed and Art is justified!

Ah, nevermore the dull neglect, that smothers
The bard's dependent being, shall return;
Forgotten lines are on the lips of others,
Extinguished thoughts in other spirits burn!

Still hoarded lives what seemed so spent and wasted,
And echoes come from dark or empty years;
Here brims the golden cup, no more untasted,
But fame is dim through mists of grateful tears.

I sang but as the living spirit taught me,
Beat towards the light, perchance with wayward wing;
And still must answer, for the cheer you 've brought me:
I sang because I could not choose but sing.

From that wide air, whose greedy silence swallows
So many voices, even as mine seemed lost,
I hear you speak, and sudden glory follows,
As from a falling tongue of Pentecost.

So heard and hailed by you, that, standing nearest,
Blend love with faith in one far-shining flame,
I hold anew the earliest gift and dearest, —
The happy Song that cares not for its fame!

HOME PASTORALS

1869–1874

PROEM

I

Now, when the mocking-bird returned, from his Florida winter,
Sings where the sprays of the elm first touch the plumes of the cypress;
When on the southern porch the stars of the jessamine sparkle
Faint in the dusk of leaves; and the thirsty ear of the Poet
Calls for the cup of song himself must mix ere it gladden, —
Careful vintager first, though latest guest at the banquet, —
Where shall he turn? What foreign Muse invites to her vineyard?
Out of what bloom of the Past the wine of remoter romances?
Foxy our grapes, of earthy tang and a wildwood astringence
Unto fastidious tongues; but later, it may be, their juices,
Mellowed by time, shall grow to be sweet on the palates of others.
So will I paint in my verse the forms of the life I am born to,
Not mediæval, or ancient! For whatso hath palpable colors,
Drawn from being and blood, nor thrown by the spectrum of Fancy,
Charms in the Future even as truth of the Past in the Present.

II

Not for this, nor for nearer voices of intimate counsel, —
When were ever they heeded? — but since I am sated with visions,
Sated with all the siren Past and its rhythmical phantoms,
Here will I seek my songs in the quiet fields of my boyhood,
Here, where the peaceful tent of home is pitched for a season.
High is the house and sunny the lawn: the capes of the woodlands
Bluff, and buttressed with many boughs, are gates to the distance,
Blue with hill over hill, that sink as the pausing of music.
Here the hawthorn blossoms, the breeze is blithe in the orchards,
Winds from the Chesapeake dull the sharper edge of the winters,
Letting the cypress live, and the mounded box, and the holly;
Here the chestnuts fall and the cheeks of peaches are crimson,
Ivy clings to the wall and sheltered fattens the fig-tree.
North and South are as one in the blended growth of the region,
One in the temper of man, and ancient, inherited habits.

III

Yet, though fair as the lóveliest landscapes of pastoral England,
Who hath touched them with song? and whence my music, and whither?
Life still bears the stamp of its early struggle and labor,
Still is shorn of its color by pious Quaker repression,
Still is turbid with calm, or only swift in the shallows.
Gone are the olden cheer, the tavern-dance and the fox-hunt,
Muster at trainings, buxom lasses that rode upon pillions,

Husking-parties and jovial home-comings after the wedding,
Gone, as they never had been! — and now, the serious people
Solemnly gather to hear some wordy itinerant speaker
Talking of Temperance, Peace, or the Right of Suffrage for Women.
Sport, that once like a boy was equally awkward and restless,
Sits with thumb in his mouth, while a petulant ethical bantling
Struts with his rod, and threatens our careless natural joyance.
Weary am I with all this preaching the force of example,
Painful duty to self, and painfuller still to one's neighbor,
Moral shibboleths, dinned in one's ears with slavering unction,
Till, for the sake of a change, profanity loses its terrors.

IV

Clearly, if song is here to be found, I must seek it within me:
Song, the darling spirit that ever asserted her freedom,
Soaring on sunlit wing above the clash of opinions,
Poised at the height of Good with a sweeter and lovelier instinct!
Call thee I will not, my life's one dear and beautiful Angel,
Wayward, faithful and fond; but, like the Friends in the Meeting,
Waiting, will so dispose my soul in the pastoral stillness,
That, denied to Desire, Obedience yet may invite thee!

MAY-TIME

I

Yes, it is May! though not that the young leaf pushes its velvet
Out of the sheath, that the stubbornest sprays are beginning to bourgeon,
Larks responding aloft to the mellow flute of the bluebird,
Nor that song and sunshine and odors of life are immingled
Even as wines in a cup; but that May, with her delicate philtres
Drenches the veins and the valves of the heart, — a double possession,
Touching the sleepy sense with sweet, irresistible languor,
Piercing, in turn, the languor with flame: as the spirit, requickened
Stirred in the womb of the world, foreboding a birth and a being!

II

Who can hide from her magic, break her insensible thraldom,
Clothing the wings of eager delight as with plumage of trouble?
Sweeter, perchance, the embryo Spring, forerunner of April,
When on banks that slope to the south the saxifrage wakens,
When, beside the dentils of frost that cornice the road-side,
Weeds are a promise, and woods betray the trailing arbutus.
Once is the sudden miracle seen, the truth and its rapture
Felt, and the pulse of the possible May is throbbing already.
Thus unto me, a boy, the clod that was warm in the sunshine,
Murmurs of thaw, and imagined hurry of growth in the herbage,
Airs from over the southern hills, — and something within me
Catching a deeper sign from these than ever the senses, —
Came as a call: I awoke, and heard, and endeavored to answer.
Whence should fall in my lap the sweet, impossible marvel?
When would the silver fay appear from the willowy thicket?
When from the yielding rock the gnome with his basket of jewels?
"When, ah when?" I cried, on the steepest perch of the hillside
Standing with arms outspread, and waiting a wind that should bear me
Over the apple-tree tops and over the farms of the valley.

III

He, that will, let him backward set the stream of his fancy,
So to evoke a dream from the ruined world of his boyhood!
Lo, it is easy! Yonder, lapped in the folds of the uplands,
Bickers the brook, to warmer hollows southerly creeping,
Where the veronica's eyes are blue, the buttercup brightens,
Where the anemones blush, the coils of fern are unrolling
Hour by hour, and over them flutter the sprinkles of shadow.
There shall I lie and dangle my naked feet in the water,
Watching the sleeping buds as one after one they awaken,
Seeking a lesson in each, a brookside primrose of Wordsworth? —
Lie in the lap of May, as a babe that loveth the cradle,
I, whom her eye inspires, whom the breath of her passion arouses?
Say, shall I stray with bended head to look for her posies,
When with other wings than the coveted lift of the breezes
Far I am borne, at her call: and the pearly abysses are parted
Under my flight: the glimmering edge of the planet, receding,
Rounds to the splendider sun and ripens to glory of color.
Veering at will, I view from a crest of the jungled Antilles
Sparkling, limitless billows of greenness, falling and flowing
Into fringes of palm and the foam of the blossoming coffee, —
Cratered isles in the offing, milky blurs of the coral
Keys, and vast, beyond, the purple arc of the ocean:
Or, in the fanning furnace-winds of the tenantless Pampas,
Hear the great leaves clash, the shiver and hiss of the reed-beds.
Thus for the crowded fulness of life I leave its beginnings,
Not content to feel the sting of an exquisite promise
Ever renewed and accepted, and ever freshly forgotten.

IV

Wherefore, now, recall the pictures of memory? Wherefore
Yearn for a fairer seat of life than this I have chosen?
Ah, while my quiver of wandering years was yet unexhausted,
Treading the lands, a truant that wasted the gifts of his freedom,
Sweet was the sight of a home — or tent, or cottage, or castle, —
Sweet unto pain; and never beheld I a Highlander's shieling,
Never a Flemish hut by a lazy canal and its pollards,
Never the snowy gleam of a porch through Apennine orchards,
Never a nest of life on the hoary hills of Judæa,
Dropped on the steppes of the Don, or hidden in valleys of Norway,
But, with the fond and foolish trick of a heart that was homeless,
Each was mine, as I passed: I entered in and possessed it,
Looked, in fancy, forth, and adjusted my life to the landscape.
Easy it seemed, to shift the habit of blood as a mantle,
Fable a Past, and lightly take the form of the Future,
So that a rest were won, a hold for the filaments, floating
Loose in the winds of Life. Here, now, behold it accomplished!
Nay, but the restless Fate, the certain Nemesis follows,
As to the bird the voice that bids him prepare for his passage,
Saying: "Not this is the whole, not these, nor any, the borders
Set for thy being; this measured, slow repetition of Nature,
Painting, effacing, in turn, with hardly a variant outline,
Cannot replace for thee the Earth's magnificent frescoes!
Art thou content to inhabit a simple pastoral chamber,
Leaving the endless halls of her grandeur and glory untrodden?"

V

Man, I answer, is more: I am glutted with physical beauty
Born of the suns and rains and the plastic throes of the ages.
Man is more; but neither dwarfed like a tree of the Arctic
Vales, nor clipped into shape as a yew in the gardens of princes.
Give me to know him, here, where inherited laws and disguises
Hide him at times from himself, — where his thought is chiefly collective,
Where, with numberless others fettered like slaves in a coffle,
Each insists he is free, inasmuch as his bondage is willing.
Who hath rent from the babe the primitive rights of his nature?
Who hath fashioned his yoke? who patterned beforehand his manhood?
Say, shall never a soul be moved to challenge its portion,
Seek for a wider heritage lost, a new disenthralment,
Sending a root to be fed from the deep original sources,
So that the fibres wax till they split the centuried granite?
Surely, starting alike at birth from the ignorant Adam,
Every type of the race were herein distinctly repeated,
Hinted in hopes and desires, and harmless divergence of habit,
Save that the law of the common mind is invisibly written
Even on our germs, and Life but warms into color the letters.

VI

Thence, it may be, accustomed to dwell in a moving horizon,
Here, alas! the steadfast circle of things is a weary
Round of monotonous forms: I am haunted by livelier visions.
Linking men and their homes, endowing both with the language,
Sweeter than speech, the soul detects in a natural picture,
I to my varying moods the fair remembrances summon,
Glad that once and somewhere each was a perfect possession.
Two will I paint, the forms of the double passion of May-time, —
Rest and activity, indolent calm and the sweep of the senses.
One, the soft green lap of a deep Dalecarlian valley,
Sheltered by piny hills and the distant porphyry mountains;
Low and red the house, and the meadow spotted with cattle;
All things fair and clear in the light of the midsummer Sabbath,
Touching, beyond the steel-blue lake and the twinkle of birch-trees,
Houses that nestle like chicks around the motherly church-roof.
There, I know, there is innocence, ancient duty and honor,
Love that looks from the eye and truth that sits on the forehead,
Pure, sweet blood of health, and the harmless freedom of nature,
Witless of blame; for the heart is safe in inviolate childhood.
Dear is the scene, but it fades: I see, with a leap of the pulses,
Tawny under the lidless sun the sand of the Desert,
Fiery solemn hills, and the burning green of the date-trees
Belting the Nile: the tramp of the curvetting stallions is muffled;
Brilliantly stamped on the blue are the white and scarlet of turbans;
Lances prick the sky with a starry glitter; the fulness,
Joy, and delight of life are sure of the day and the morrow,
Certain the gifts of sense, and the simplest order suffices.
Breathing again, as once, the perfect air of the Desert,
Good it seems to escape from the endless menace of duty,
There, where the will is free, and wilfully plays with its freedom,
And the lack of will for the evil thing is a virtue.

VII

Man is more, I have said: but the subject mood is a fashion
Wrought of his lighter mind and dyed with the hues of his senses.

Then to be truly more, to be verily free, to be master
As beseems to the haughty soul that is lifted by knowledge
Over the multitude's law, enforcing their own acquiescence, —
Lifted to longing and will, in its satisfied loneliness centred, —
This prohibits the cry of the nerves, the weak lamentation
Shaming my song : for I know whence cometh its languishing burden.
Impotent all I have dreamed, — and the calmer vision assures me
Such were barren, and vapid the taste of joy that is skin-deep.
Better the nest than the wandering wing, the loving possession,
Intimate, ever-renewed, than the circle of shallower changes.

AUGUST

I

Dead is the air, and still ! the leaves of the locust and walnut
Lazily hang from the boughs, inlaying their intricate outlines
Rather on space than the sky, — on a tideless expansion of slumber.
Faintly afar in the depths of the duskily withering grasses
Katydids chirp, and I hear the monotonous rattle of crickets.
Dead is the air, and ah ! the breath that was wont to refresh me
Out of the volumes I love, the heartful, whispering pages,
Dies on the type, and I see but wearisome characters only.
Therefore be still, thou yearning voice from the garden in Jena, —
Still, thou answering voice from the park-side cottage in Weimar, —
Still, sentimental echo from chambers of office in Dresden, —
Ye, and the feebler and farther voices that sound in the pauses !
Each and all to the shelves I return : for vain is your commerce
Now, when the world and the brain are numb in the torpor of August.

II

Over the tasselled corn, and fields of the twice-blossomed clover,
Dimly the hills recede in the reek of the colorless hazes :
Dull and lustreless, now, the burnished green of the woodlands ;
Leaves of blackberry briers are bronzed and besprinkled with copper ;
Weeds in the unmown meadows are blossoming purple and yellow,
Roughly entwined, a wreath for the tan and wrinkles of Summer.
Where shall I turn ? What path attracts the indifferent footstep,
Eager no more as in June, nor lifted with wings as in May-time ?
Whitherward look for a goal, when buds have exhausted their promise,
Harvests are reaped, and grapes and berries are waiting for Autumn ?
Wander, my feet, as ye list ! I am careless, to-day, to direct you.
Take, here, the path by the pines, the russet carpet of needles
Stretching from wood to wood, and hidden from sight by the orchard :
Here, in the sedge of the slope, the centaury pink, as a sea-shell,
Opens her stars all at once, and with finer than tropical spices
Sweetens the season's drouth, the censer of fields that are sterile.
Now, from the height of the grove, between the irregular tree-trunks,
Over the falling fields and the meadowy curves of the valley,
Glimmer the peaceful farms, the mossy roofs of the houses,
Gables gray of the neighboring barns, and gleams of the highway
Climbing the ridges beyond to dip in the dream of a forest.

III

Ah, forsaking the shade, and slowly crushing the stubble,
Parting the viscous roseate stems and the keen pennyroyal,

Rises a different scene, suggestion of heat and of stillness, —
Heat as intense and stillness as dumb, the immaculate ether's
Hush when it vaults the waveless Mediterranean sea-floor;
Golden the hills of Cos, with pencilled cerulean shadows;
Phantoms of Carian shores that are painted and fade in the distance;
Patmos behind, and westward the flushed Ariadnean Naxos, —
Once as I saw them sleeping, drugged by the poppy of Summer.
There, indeed, was the air, as with floating stars of the thistle
Filled with impalpable forms, regrets, possibilities, longings,
Beauty that was and was not, and Life that was rhythmic and joyous,
So that the sun-baked clay the peasant took for his wine-jars
Brighter than gold I thought, and the red acidity nectar.
Here, at my feet, the clay is clay and a nuisance the stubble,
Flaring St. John's-wort, milk-weed, and coarse, unpoetical mullein; —
Yet, were it not for the poets, say, is the asphodel fairer?
Were not the mullein as dear, had Theocritus sung it, or Bion?
Yea, but they did not; and we, whose fancy's tenderest tendrils
Shoot unsupported, and wither, for want of a Past we can cling to,
We, so starved in the Present, so weary of singing the Future, —
What is 't to us, if, haply, a score of centuries later,
Milk-weed inspires Patagonian tourists, and mulleins are classic?

IV

Idly balancing fortunes, feeling the spite of them, maybe, —
For the little withheld outweighs the much that is given, —
Feeling the pang of the brain, the endless, unquenchable yearning
Born of the knowledge of Beauty, not to be shared or imparted,
Slowly I stray, and drop by degrees to the thickets of alder
Fringing a couch of the stream, a basin of watery slumber.
Broken, it seems; for the splash and the drip and the bubbles betoken
What? — the bath of a nymph, the bashful strife of a Hylas?
Broad is the back, and bent from an un-Olympian stooping,
Narrow the loins and firm, the white of the thighs and the shoulders
Changing to reddest and toughest of tan at the knees and the elbows.
Is it a faun? He sees me, nor cares to hide in the thickets.
Faun of the bog is he, a sylvan creature of Galway
Come from the ditch below, to cleanse him of sweat and of muck-stain;
Willing to give me speech, as, naked, he stands in the shallows.
Something of coarse, uncouth, barbaric, he leaves on the bank there;
Something of primitive human fairness cometh to clothe him.
Were he not bent with the pick, but straightened from reaching the bunches
Hung from the mulberry branches, — heard he the bacchanal cymbals,
Took from the sun an even gold on the web of his muscles,
Knew the bloom of his stunted bud of delight of the senses, —
Then as faun or shepherd he might have been welcome in marble.
Yea, but he is not; and I, requiring the beautiful balance,
Music of life in the body, and limbs too fair to be hidden,
Find, indeed, some delicate colors and possible graces, —
Moral hints of the man beneath the unsavory garments, —
Find them, and sigh, lamenting the law reversed of the races
Starting the world afresh on the basis unlovely of Labor.

V

Was it a spite of fate that blew me hither, an exile,
Still unweaned, and not to be weaned, from the milk I was born to?
Bitter the stranger's bread to the homesick, hungering palate;

Bitterer still to the soul the taste of the food that is foreign!
Yet must I take it, yet live, and somehow seem to be healthy,
Lest my neighbors, perchance, be shocked by an uncomprehended
Violent clamor for that which I crave and they cannot supply me, —
Hunger unmeet for the times, anachronistical passions, —
Beauty seeming distorted because the rule is distortion.
Here is a tangle which, now, too idle am I to unravel,
Snared, moreover, by bitter-sweet, moon-seed, and riotous fox-grape,
Meshing the thickets: *procul, O procul,* unpractical fancies!
Verily, thus bewildering myself in the maze of æsthetic,
Solveless problems, the feet were wellnigh heedlessly fettered.
Thoughtless, 'tis true, I relinquished my books; but *crescit eundo*
Wisely was said, — for desperate vacancy prompted the ramble,
Memories prolonged, and a phantom of logic urges it onward.

VI

Here are the fields again! The soldierly maize in tassel
Stands on review, and carries the scabbarded ears in its arm-pits.
Rustling I part the ranks, — the close, engulfing battalions
Shaking their plumes overhead, — and, wholly bewildered and heated,
Gain the top of the ridge, where stands, colossal, the pin-oak.
Yonder, a mile away, I see the roofs of the village, —
See the crouching front of the meeting-house of the Quakers,
Oddly conjoined with the whittled Presbyterian steeple.
Right and left are the homes of the slow, conservative farmers,
Loyal people and true, but, now that the battles are over,
Zealous for Temperance, Peace, and the Right of Suffrage for Women.
Orderly, moral, are they, — at least, in the sense of suppression;
Given to preaching of rules, inflexible outlines of duty;
Seeing the sternness of life, but, alas! overlooking its graces.
Let me be juster: the scattered seeds of the graces are planted
Widely apart; but the trumpet-vine on the porch is a token;
Yea, and awake and alive are the forces of love and affection,
Plastic forces that work from the tenderer models of beauty.
Who shall dare to speak of the possible? Who shall encounter
Pity and wrath and reproach, recalling the record immortal
Left by the races when Beauty was law and Joy was religion?
Who to the Duty in drab shall bring the garlanded Pleasure? —
Break with the chant of the gods, the gladsome timbrels of morning,
Nasal, monotonous chorals, sung by the sad congregation?
Better it were to sleep with the owl, to house with the hornet,
Than to conflict with the satisfied moral sense of the people.

VII

Nay, but let me be just; nor speak with the alien language
Born of my blood; for, cradled among them, I know them and love them.
Was it my fault, if a strain of the distant and dead generations
Rose in my being, renewed, and made me other than these are?
Purer, perhaps, their habit of law than the freedom they shrink from;
So, restricted by will, a little indulgence is riot.
They, content with the glow of a carefully tempered twilight,
Measured pulses of joy, and colorless growth of the senses,
Stand aghast at my dream of the sun, and the sound, and the splendor!
Mine it is, and remains, resenting the threat of suppression,
Stubbornly shaping my life, and feeding with fragments its hunger.
Drifted from Attican hills to stray on a Scythian level,
So unto me it appears, — unto them a perversion and scandal.

VIII

Lo! in the vapors, the sun, colossal and crimson and beamless,
Touches the woodland; fingers of air prepare for the dew-fall.
Life is fresher and sweeter, insensibly toning to softness
Needs and desires that are but the broidered hem of its mantle,
Not the texture of daily use; and the soul of the landscape,
Breathing of justified rest, of peace developed by patience,
Lures me to feel the exquisite senses that come from denial,
Sharper passion of Beauty never fulfilled in external
Forms or conditions, but always a fugitive has-been or may-be.
Bright and alive as a want, incarnate it dozes and fattens.
Thus, in aspiring, I reach what were lost in the idle possession;
Helped by the laws I resist, the forces that daily depress me;
Bearing in secreter joy a luminous life in my bosom,
Fair as the stars on Cos, the moon on the boscage of Naxos!
Thus the skeleton Hours are clothed with rosier bodies:
Thus the buried Bacchanals rise unto lustier dances:
Thus the neglected god returns to his desolate temple:
Beauty, thus rethroned, accepts and blesses her children!

NOVEMBER

I

Wrapped in his sad-colored cloak, the Day, like a Puritan, standeth
Stern in the joyless fields, rebuking the lingering color, —
Dying hectic of leaves and the chilly blue of the asters, —
Hearing, perchance, the croak of a crow on the desolate tree-top,
Breathing the reek of withered weeds, or the drifted and sodden
Splendors of woodland, as whoso piously groaneth in spirit:
"Vanity, verily; yea, it is vanity, let me forsake it!
Yea, let it fade, for Life is the empty clash of a cymbal,
Joy a torch in the hands of a fool, and Beauty a pitfall!"

II

Once, I remember, when years had the long duration of ages,
Came, with November, despair; for summer had vanished forever.
Lover of light, my boyish heart as a lover's was jealous,
Followed forsaking suns and felt its passion rejected,
Saw but Age and Death, in the whole wide circle of Nature
Throned forever; and hardly yet have I steadied by knowledge
Faith that faltered and patience that was but a weary submission.
Though to the right and left I hear the call of the huskers
Scattered among the rustling shocks, and the cheerily whistled
Lilt of an old plantation tune from an ebony teamster,
These behold no more than the regular jog of a mill-wheel
Where, unto me, there is possible end and diviner beginning.
Silent are now the flute of Spring and the clarion of Summer
As they had never been blown: the wail of a dull *Miserere*
Heavily sweeps the woods, and, stifled, dies in the valleys.

III

Who are they that prate of the sweet consolation of Nature?
They who fly from the city's heat for a month to the sea-shore,
Drink of unsavory springs, or camp in the green Adirondacks?
They, long since, have left with their samples of ferns and of algæ,

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Memories carefully dried and somewhat lacking in color,
Gossip of tree and cliff and wave and modest adventure,
Such as a graceful sentiment — not too earnest — admits of,
Heard in the pause of a dance or bridging the gaps of a dinner.
Nay, but I, who know her, exult in her profligate seasons,
Turn from the silence of men to her fancied, fond recognition,
I am repelled at last by her sad and cynical humor.
Kinder, cheerier now, were the pavements crowded with people,
Walls that hide the sky, and the endless racket of business.
There a hope in something lifts and enlivens the current,
Face seeth face, and the hearts of a million, beating together,
Hidden though each from other, at least are outwardly nearer,
Lending the life of all to the one, — bestowing and taking,
Weaving a common web of strength in the meshes of contact,
Close, yet never impeded, restrained, yet delighting in freedom.
There the soul, secluded in self, or touching its fellow
Only with horny palms that hide the approach of the pulses,
Driven abroad, discovers the secret signs of its kindred,
Kisses on lips unknown, and words on the tongue of the stranger.
Life is set to a statelier march, a grander accordance
Follows its multitudinous steps of dance and of battle:
Part hath each in the music; even the sacredest whisper
Findeth a soul unafraid and an ear that is ready to listen.

IV

Nature? 'T is well to sing of the glassy Bandusian fountain,
Shining Ortygian beaches, or flocks on the meadows of Enna,
Linking the careless life with the careless mood of the Mother.
We, afar and alone, confronted with heavier questions,
Robbed of the oaten pipe before it is warm in our fingers,
Why should we feign a faith? — why crown an indifferent goddess?
Under the gray, monotonous vault what carolling song-bird
Hopes for an echo? Closer and lower the vapors are folded;
Sighing shiver the woods, though drifted leaves are unrustled;
Ghosts of the grasses that fled with a breath and floated in sunshine
Hang unstirred on brier and fence; for a new desolation
Comes with the rain, that, chilly and quietly creeping at nightfall,
Thence for many a day shall dismally drizzle and darken.

V

"See!" (methinks I hear the mechanical routine repeated,)
"Emblems of faith in the folded bud and the seed that is sleeping!"
Knowledge, not Faith, deduced the similitude; how shall an emblem
Give to the soul the steadfast truth that alone satisfies it?
Joy of the Spring I can feel, but not the preaching of Autumn.
Earth, if a lesson is wrought upon each of thy radiant pages,
Give us the words that sustain us, and not the words that discourage!
Sceptic art thou become, the breeder of doubt and confusion,
Powerless vassal of Fate, assuming a meek resignation,
Yielding the forces that moved in thy life and made it triumphant!

VI

Now, as my circle of home is slowly swallowed in darkness,
As with the moan of winds the rain is drearily falling, —
Hopes that drew as the sun and aims that stood as the pole-star
Fading aloof from my life as though it never had known them, —

Where, when the wont is deranged, shall I find a permanent foothold?
Stripped of the rags of Time I see the form of my being,
Born of all that ever has been, and haughtily reaching
Forward to all that comes, — yet certain, this moment, of nothing.
Chide or condemn as ye may, the truant and mutinous spirit
Turns on itself, and forces release from its holiest habit;
Soars where the suns are sprinkled in cold illimited darkness,
Peoples the spheres with far diviner forms of existence,
Questions, conjectures at will; for Earth and its creeds are forgotten.
Thousands of æons it gathers, yet scarce its feet are supported;
Dumb is the universe unto the secrets of Whence? and of Whither?
So, as a dove through the summits of ether falling exhausted,
Under it yawns the blank of an infinite Something — or Nothing!

VII

Let me indulge in the doubt, for this is the token of freedom,
This is all that is safe from hands that would fain intermeddle,
Thrusting their worn phylacteries over the eyes that are seeking
Truth as it shines in the sky, not truth as it smokes in their lantern.
Ah, shall I venture alone beyond the limits they set us,
Bearing the spark within till a breath of the Deity fan it
Into an upward-pointing flame? — and, forever unquiet,
Nearer through error advance, and nearer through ignorant yearning?
Yes, it must be: the soul from the soul cannot hide or diminish
Aught of its essence: here the duplicate nature is ended:
Here the illusions recede, at man's unassailable centre.
And the nearness and farness of God are all that is left him.

VIII

Lo! as I muse, there come on the lonely darkness and silence
Gleams like those of the sun that reach his uttermost planet,
Inwardly dawning; and faint and sweet as the voices of waters
Borne from a sleeping mountain-vale on a breeze of the midnight,
Falls a message of cheer: "Be calm, for to doubt is to seek whom
None can escape, and the soul is dulled with an idle acceptance.
Crying, questioning, stumbling in gloom, thy pathway ascendeth;
They with the folded hands at the last relapse into strangers.
Over thy head, behold! the wing with its measureless shadow
Spread against the light, is the wing of the Angel of Unfaith,
Chosen of God to shield the eyes of men from His glory.
Thus through mellower twilights of doubt thou climbest undazzled,
Mornward ever directed, and even in wandering guided.
God is patient of souls that reach through an endless creation,
So but His shadow be seen, but heard the trail of His mantle!"

IX

Who is alone in this? The elder brothers, immortal,
Leaned o'er the selfsame void and rose to the same consolation,
Human therein as we, however diviner their message.
Even as the liquid soul of summer, pent in the flagon,
Waits in the darksome vault till we crave its odor and sunshine,
So in the Past the words of life, the voices eternal.
Freedom like theirs we claim, yet lovingly guard in the freedom
Sympathies due to the time and help to the limited effort;
Thus with double arms embracing our duplicate being,
Setting a foot in either world, we stand as the Masters.

Ah, but who can arise so far, except in his longing?
Give me thy hand! — the soft and quickening life of thy pulses
Spans the slackened spirit and lifts the eyelids of Fancy:
Doubt is of loneliness born, belief companions the lover.
Ever from thee, as once from youth's superfluous forces,
Courage and hope are renewed, the endless future created.
Out of the season's hollow the sunken sun shall be lifted,
Bringing faith in his beams, the green resurrection of Easter,
After the robes of death by the angels of air have been scattered,
Climbing the heights of heaven, to stand supreme at his solstice!

L'ENVOI

I

May-time and August, November, and over the winter to May-time,
Year after year, or shaken by nearness of imminent battle,
Or as remote from the stir as an isle of the sleepy Pacific,
Here, at least, I have tasted peace in the pauses of labor,
Rest as of sleep, the gradual growth of deliberate Nature.
Here, escaped from the conflict of taste, the confusion of voices
Heard in a land where the form of Art abides as a stranger,
Come to me definite hopes and clearer possible duties,
Faith in the steadfast service, content with tardy achievement.
Here, in men, I have found the elements working as elsewhere,
Ever betraying the surge and swell of invisible currents,
Which, from beneath, from the deepest bases of thought in the people
Press, and heavy with change, and filled with visions unspoken,
Bear us onward to shape the formless face of the Future.

II

Now, if the tree I planted for mine must shadow another's,
If the uncounted tender memories, sown with the seasons,
Filling the webs of ivy, the grove, the terrace of roses,
Clothing the lawn with unwithering green, the orchard with blossoms,
Singing a finer song to the exquisite motion of waters,
Breathing profounder calm from the dark Dodonian oak-trees,
Now must be lost, till, haply, the hearts of others renew them, —
Yet we have had and enjoyed, we have and enjoy them forever.
Drops from the bough the fruit that here was sunnily ripened:
Other will grow as well on the westward slope of the garden.
Sorrowing not, nor driven forth by the sword of an angel,
Nay, but borne by a fuller tide as a ship from the harbor,
Slowly out of our eyes the pastoral bliss of the landscape
Fades, and is dim, and sinks below the rim of the ocean.

III

Sorrowing not, I have said: with thee was the ceasing of sorrow.
Hope from thy lips I have drawn, and subtler strength from thy spirit,
Sharer of dream and of deed, inflexible conscience of Beauty!
Though as a Grace thou art dear, as a guardian Muse thou art earnest,
Walking with purer feet the paths of song that I venture,
Side by side, unwearied, in cheerful, encouraging silence.
Not thy constant woman's heart alone I have wedded;
One are we made in patience and faith and high aspiration.
Thus, at last, the light of the fortunate age is recovered:
Thus, wherever we wander, the shrine and the oracle follow!

LARS:

A PASTORAL OF NORWAY

TO

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

THROUGH many years my heart goes back,
Through checkered years of loss and gain,
To that fair landmark on its track,
When first, beside the Merrimack,
Upon thy cottage roof I heard the autumn rain.

A hand that welcomed and that cheered
To one unknown didst thou extend;
Thou gavest hope to Song that feared;
But now, by Time and Faith endeared,
I claim the sacred right to call the Poet, Friend!

However Life the stream may stain,
From thy pure fountain drank my youth
The simple creed, the faith humane
In Good, that never can be slain,
The prayer for inward Light, the search for outward Truth!

Like thee, I see at last prevail
The sleepless soul that looks above;
I hear, far off, the hymns that hail
The Victor, clad in heavenly mail,
Whose only weapons are the eyes and voice of Love!

Take, then, these olive leaves from me,
To mingle with thy brighter bays!
Some balm of peace and purity,
In them, may faintly breathe of thee;
And take the grateful love, wherein I hide thy praise!

LARS:

A PASTORAL OF NORWAY

BOOK I

On curtained eyes, and bosoms warm with rest,
On slackened fingers and unburdened feet,
On limbs securer slumber held from toil,
While nimble spirits of the busy blood
Renewed their suppleness, yet filled the trance
With something happy which was less than dream,
The sun of Sabbath rose. Two hours, afar,
Behind the wintry peaks of Justedal,
Unmarked, he climbed; then, pausing on the crest
Of Fille Fell, he gathered up his beams
Dissolved in warmer blue, and showered them down
Between the mountains, through the falling vale,
On Ulvik's cottages and orchard trees.
And one by one the chimneys breathed; the sail
That loitered lone along the misty fiord
Flashed like a star, and filled with fresher wind;
The pasturing steers, dispersed on grassy slopes,
Raised heads of wonder over hedge and wall
To call, unanswered, the belated cows;
And ears that would not hear, or heard in dreams,
The lark's alarum over idle fields,
And lids, still sweetly shut, that else unclosed
At touch of daybreak, yielded to the day.

Then, last of all, among the maidens, met
To dip fresh faces in the chilly fount,
And smoothen braids of sleep-entangled hair,
Came Brita, glossy as a mating bird.
No need had she to stoop and wash awake
Her drowsy senses: air and water kissed
A face as bright and breathing as their own,
In joy of life and conscious loveliness.
If still her mirror's picture stayed with her,
A memory, whispering how the downcast lid
Shaded the flushing fairness of her cheek,
And hinting how a straying lock relieved
The rigid fashion of her hair, or how
The curve of slightly parted lips became
Half-sad, half-smiling, either meaning much
Or naught, as wilful humor might decide, —
Yet thence was born the grace she could not lose:
Her beauty, guarded, kept her beautiful.

"Wilt soon be going, Brita?" Ragnil asked;
"And which the way, — by fiord or over fell?"
"Why, both!" another laughed; "or else the rocks
Will split and slide beneath the feet of Lars,
Or Per will meet the Kraken!" Brita held
One dark-brown braid between her teeth, and wove
The silken twine and tassels through its fringe,
Before she spake; but first she seemed to sigh:
"I will not choose; you shall not spoil my day!
All paths are free that lead across the fell;
All wakes are free to keels upon the fiord,
And even so my will: come Lars or Per,
Come Erik, Anders, Harald, Olaf, Nils,
Come sœter-boys, or sailors from the sea,
No lass is bound to slight a decent lad,
Or walk behind him when the way is wide."

"No way is wide enough for three, I've heard,"
Said Ragnil, "save there be two men that prop
A third, when market's over."

"Go your ways!"
Then Brita cried: "if two or twelve should come,
I call them not, nor do I bid them go:
A friendly word is no betrothal ring."

Then tossed she back her braids, and with them tossed
Her wilful head. "Why, take you both, or all!"
She said, and left them, adding, "if you can!"
With silent lips, nor cared what prudent fears,
Old-fashioned wisdom, dropped in parrot-words,
Chattered behind her as she climbed the lane.
Along her path the unconverted bees
Set toil to music, and the elder-flowers
Bent o'er the gate a snowy entrance-arch,
Where, highest on the slope, her cottage sat.
Her bed of pinks there yielded to the sun
Its clove and cinnamon odors; sheltered there
Beneath the eaves, a rose-tree nursed its buds,
And through the door, across the dusk within,
She saw her grandam set the morning broth
And cut a sweeter loaf. All breathed of peace,
Of old, indulgent love, and simple needs,
Yet Brita sighed, — then blushed because she sighed.

"Dear Lord!" the ancient dame began, "'t is just
The day, the sun, the breeze, the smell of flowers,
As fifty years ago, in Hallingdal,
When I, like thee, picked out my smartest things,
And put them on, half guessing what would hap,
And found my luck before I took them off.
See! thou shalt wear the brooch, my mother's then,
And thine when I am gone. Some luck, who knows?
May still be shining in the fair red stone."
So, from a box that breathed of musky herbs,
She took the boss of roughly fashioned gold,

With garnets studded: took, but gave not yet.
Some pleasure in the smooth, cool touch of gold,
Or wine-red sparkles, flickering o'er the stones,
Or dream of other fingers, other lips
That kissed them for the bed they rocked upon
That happy summer eve in Hallingdal,
Gave her slow heart its girlhood's pulse again,
Her cheek one last leaf of its virgin rose.

Oh, foolishness of age! She dared not say
What then she felt: Go, child, enjoy the bliss
Of innocent woman, ripe for need of man,
And needing him no less! Some natural art
Will guide thy guileless fancies, some pure voice
Will whisper truth, and lead thee to thy fate!
But, ruled by ancient habit, counselled thus:
"Be on thy guard, my Brita! men are light
Of tongue, and unto faces such as thine
Mean not the half they say: the girl is prized
Who understands their ways, and holds them off
Till he shall come, who, facing her, as she
And death were one, pleads for his life with her:
When such an one thou meetest, thou wilt know."

"Nay, grandam!" Brita said! "I will not hear
A voice so dreadful-earnest: I am young,
And I can give and take, not meaning much,
Nor over-anxious to seem death to men:
I like them all, and they are good to me.
I'll wear thy brooch, and may it bring me luck,
Not such as thine was, as I guess it was,
But, in the kirk, short sermon, cheerful hymn,
Good neighbors on the way, and for the dance
A light-foot partner!" With a rippling laugh
That brushed the surface of her heart, and hid
Whatever doubt its quiet had betrayed,
She kissed the withered cheek, and on her breast
Pinned the rough golden boss with wine-red stones.
"Come, Brita, come!" rang o'er the elder-flowers:
"I come!" she answered, threw her fleeting face
Upon the little mirror, took her bunch
Of feathered pinks, and joined the lively group
Of Sundayed lads and lasses in the lane.

They set themselves to climb the stubborn fell
By stony stairs that left the fields below,
And ceased, far up, against the nearer blue.
But lightly sprang the maids; and where the slides
Of ice ground smooth the slanting planes of rock,
Strong arms drew up and firm feet steadied theirs.
Here lent the juniper a prickly hand,
And there they grasped the heather's frowsy hair,
While jest and banter made the giddy verge
Secure as orchard-turf; and none but showed
The falcon's eye that guides the hunter's foot,
Till o'er their flushed and breathless faces struck

The colder ether; on the crest they stood,
And sheltered vale and ever-winding fiord
Sank into gulfs of shadow, while afar
To eastward many a gleaming tooth of snow
Cut the full round of sky.

"Why, look you, now!"
Cried one: "the fiord is bare as threshing-floor
When winter 's over: what 's become of Per?"
"And what of Lars?" asked Ragnil, with a glance
At Brita's careless face; "can he have climbed
The Evil Pass, and crossed the thundering foss,
His nearest way?" As clear as blast of horn
There came a cry, and on the comb beyond
They saw the sparkle of a scarlet vest.
Then, like the echo of a blast of horn,
A moment later, fainter and subdued,
A second cry; and far to left appeared
A form that climbed and leaped, and nearer strove.
And Harald, Anders Ericssen, and Nils
Set their free voices to accordant pitch
And shouted one wild call athwart the blue,
Until it seemed to quiver: as they ceased
The maids began, and, moving onward, gave
Strong music: all the barren summits rang.

So from the shouts and girlish voices grew
The wayward chorus of a sœter-song,
Such as around the base of Skagtolstind
The chant of summer-jötun seems, when all
The herds are resting and the herdsmen meet;
And while it swept with swelling, sinking waves
The crags and ledges, Lars had joined the band,
And from the left came Per; and Brita walked
Between them where the path was broad, but when
It narrowed to such track as tread the sheep
Round slanting shoulder and o'er rocky spur
To reach the rare, sweet herbage, one went close
Before her, one behind, and unto both
With equal cheer and equal kindliness
Her speech was given: so both were glad of heart.

A herdsman, woodman, hunter, Lars was strong,
Yet silent from his life upon the hills.
Beneath dark lashes gleamed his darker eyes
Like mountain-tarns that take their changeless hue
From shadows of the pine: in all his ways
He showed that quiet of the upper world
A breath can turn to tempest, and the force
Of rooted firs that slowly split the stone.
But Per was gay with laughter of the seas
Which were his home: the billow breaking blue
On the Norwegian skerries flashed again
Within his sunbright eyes; and in his tongue,
Set to the louder, merrier key it learned
In hum of rigging, roar of wind and tide,

The rhythm of ocean and its wilful change
Allured all hearts as ocean lures the land.
Now which, this daybreak with his yellow locks,
Or yonder twilight, calm, mysterious, filled
With promise of its stars, shall turn the mind
Of the light maiden who is neither fain
To win nor lose, since, were the other not,
Then each were welcome? — how should maid decide?
For that the passion of the twain was marked,
And haply envied, and a watch was set,
She would be strong: and, knowing, seem as though
She nothing knew, until occasion came
To bid her choose, or teach her how to choose.

On each and all the soberness of morn
Yet lay, the weight of hard reality
That even clogs the callow wings of love;
And now descending, where the broader vale
Showed farm on farm, and groves of birch and oak,
And fields that shifted gloss like shimmering silk,
The kirk-bells called them through the mellow air,
Slow-swinging, till, as from a censer's cup
The smoke diffused makes all the minster sweet,
The peace they chimed pervaded earth and sky.
As under foliage of the lower land
The pathway led, more harmless fell the jest,
The laugh less frequent: then the maidens drew
Apart, set smooth their braids, their kirtles shook,
And grave, decorous as a troop of nuns,
Entered the little town. Ragnil alone
And Anders Ericssen together walked,
For twice already had their banns been called.
Lars shot one glance at Brita, as to say:
"Were thou and I thus promised, side by side!"
Then looked away; but Per, who kept as near
As decent custom let, all softly sang:
"Forget me thou, I shall remember still!"
That she might hear him, and so not forget.
Thus onward to the gray old kirk they moved.

The bells had ceased to chime: the hush within
With holy shuddering from the organ-bass
Was filled, and when it died the prayer arose.
Then came another stillness, as the Lord
Were near, or bent to listen from afar,
And last the text; but Brita found it strange.
Thus read the pastor: "Set me as a seal
Upon thy heart, yea, set me as a seal
Upon thine arm; for love is strong as death,
And jealousy is cruel as the grave."
She felt the garnets burn upon her breast,
As if all fervor of the olden love
Still heated them, and fire of jealousy,
And to herself she thought: "Has any face
Looked on me with a love as strong as death?
But I am Life, and how am I to know?"

Then, straightway weary of the puzzle, she
Began to wander with her dancing thoughts
Out o'er the fell, and up and down the slopes
Of sunny grass, while ever and anon
The preacher's solemn voice struck through her dream,
Its sound a menace and its sense unknown.
Then she was sad, and vexed that she was sad,
And vexed with them who only could have caused
Her sadness: "Grandam's luck, forsooth!" she thought:
"If one were luck, why, two by rights were more,
But two a plague, a lesser plague were one,
And not a fortune!" So, till service ceased,
And all arose when benediction came,
She mused with pettish thrust of under lip,
Nor met the yearning eyes of Lars and Per.

The day's grave duty done, forth issued all,
Foregathering with the Vossevangen youth,
The girls of Graven and the boys of Vik,
Where under elms before the guest-house front
Stood tables brown with age: already bore
The host his double-handed bunch of cans
Fresh-filled and foaming; and the cry of *Skoal!*
Mixed with the clashing kiss of glassy lips.
But when in gown of black the pastor came,
All rose, respectful, waiting for his words.
A pace in front stood Anders Ericssen,
Undignified in bridegroom dignity,
Because too conscious: Ragnil blushed with shame,
And all the maidens envied her the shame,
When reverend fingers tapped her cheek, and he,
That good man, said: "How fares my bonny bride?
She must not be the last this summer; look,
My merry lads, what harvest waits for you!"
And on the maidens turned his twinkling eyes,
That beamed a blessing with the playful words.

Then Lars slipped nearer Brita, where she stood
Withdrawn a little, underneath the trees.
"You heard the pastor," said he; "would you next
Put on the crown? not you the harvest, nay,
The reaper, rather; and the grain is ripe."
"A field," she answered, "may be ripe enough
When half the heads are empty, and the stalks
Are choked with cockle. I've no mind to reap.
Indeed, I know not what you mean: the speech
The pastor uses suits not you nor me."
She meant reproof, yet made reproof so sweet
By feigned impatience, which betrayed itself,
That Lars bent lower, murmured with quick breath:
"Oh, take my meaning, Brita! Give me one, —
But one small word to say that you are kind,
But one kind word to tell me you are free,
And I not wholly hateful!" "Lars!" she cried,
Her frank, sweet sympathy aroused, "not so!
As friendly-kind as I can be, I am,

But free of you, and all; and that 's enough!
You men would walk across the growing grain,
And trample it because it is not ripe
Before the harvest." Thereupon she smiled,
Sent him one dewy glance that should have been
Defiant, but a promise seemed; then turned,
And hastening, almost brushed the breast of Per.
He caught her by the hands, that Viking's son,
Whose fathers wore the eagle-helm, and stood
With Frithiof at the court of Angantyr,
Or followed fair-haired Harald to the East,
Though fishing now but herring, cod, and bass,
Not men and merchant-galleys: he was red
With mead, no less than sun and briny air:
He caught her by the hands, and said, as one
Who gives command and means to be obeyed:
"You 'll go to Ulvik, Brita, by the fiord!
Björn brings my boat; the wind is off the sea,
But light as from a Bergen lady's fan:
Say, then, you 'll go!"

The will within his words
Struck Brita harshly. For a moment she
Pondered refusal, then, with brightening face
Turned suddenly, and cried to all the rest:
"How fine of Per! we need not climb the fell:
He 'll bear us all to Ulvik by the fiord;
Björn brings his boat; the wind is off the sea!"
And all the rest, with roaring skoal to Per,
Struck hands upon the offer; only he
For plan so friendly showed a face too grim.
He set his teeth and muttered: "Caught this time,
But she shall pay it!" till his discontent
Passed, like a sudden squall that tears the sea,
Yet leaves a sun to smile the billows down.
His jovial nature, bred to change, was swayed
By the swift consequence of Brita's whim,
The grasp of hand, the clap of shoulder, clink
Of brimming glass, and whispers overheard
Of "Luck to Per, and Björn, and all the boys
That reap, but sow not, on the rolling fields!"
And Brita, too, no sooner punished him
Than she relented, and would fain appease;
Whence, fluttering to and fro, she kept the plan
Alive, yet made its kindness wholly Per's:
Only, when earnestly to Lars she said:
"You 'll go with us?" he answered sullenly:
"I will not go: my way is o'er the fell."

He did not quit them till they reached the strand,
And on the stern-deck and the prow was piled
The bright, warm freight; then chose a dangerous path,
A rocky ladder slanting up the crags,
And far aloft upon a foreland took
His seat, with chin upon his clenching hands,
To watch and muse, in love and hate, alone.

But they slid off upon a wind that filled
The sail, yet scarcely heeled the boat a-lee:
They seemed to rest above a hanging sky
'Twixt shores that went and shores that slowly came
In silence, and the larger shadows fell
From heaven-high walls, a darker clearness in
The air above, the firmament below,
Crossed by the sparkling creases of the sea.
Björn at the helm and Per to watch the wind,
They scarcely sailed, but soared as eagle soars
O'er Gousta's lonely peak with moveless plumes,
That, level-set, cut the blue planes of air;
And out of stillness rose that sunset hymn
Of Sicily, the *O sanctissima!*
That swells and fluctuates like a sleepy wave.
Thus they swam on to where the fiord is curved
Around the cape, where through a southward cleft
Some wicked sprite sends down his elfish flaws.
So now it chanced: the vessel sprang, and leaned
Before the sudden strain; but Per and Björn
Held the hard bit upon their flying steed,
And laughing, sang: "Out on the billows blue
You needs must dance, and on the billows blue
You sleep, a babe, rocked by the billows blue!"
As suddenly the gust was over: then
Found Per a seat by Brita. "Did you fear?"
He said; and she: "Who fears that sails with Per?"
"Nay then," he whispered, "never fear me more,
As twice to-day: why give me all this freight,
When so much less were so much more to me?"
"Since when were maidens free as fishermen?
Not since the days of Brynhild, I believe;"
She answered, sharply: "I was fain to sail,
And place for me meant place for more beside."
"Not in my heart," he said; "it holds and keeps
Thee only; thou canst not escape my love;"
And tried to take her hand: she bending o'er
The low, black bulwarks, saw a crimson spark
Drop on the surface of the pale-green wave,
And sink, surrounded by a golden gleam.
"Oh, grandam's brooch!" she cried, and started up,
Sat down again, and hid her face, and wept.
Some there lamented as the loss were theirs,
Some shook their heads in ominous dismay,
But all agreed that, save a fish should bring
The jewel in its maw (and tales declared
The thing once happened), none would see it more.
Said Guda Halstensdatter: "I should fear
An evil, had I lost it." Thorkil cried:
"Be silent, Guda! Loss is grief enough
For Brita: would you frighten her as well?
There's many think that jewels go and come,
Having some life or virtue of their own
That drives them from us or that brings them back.
'T was so with my great-grandam's wedding-ring."

"Now, how was that?" all asked; and Thorkil spake:
"Why, not a year had she been wedded, when
The ring was gone: how, where, a mystery.
It was a bitter grief, but nothing happed
Save losses, ups and downs, that come to all;
Both took their lot in patience and in hope,
And worked the harder when the luck was least.
So from the moorland and the stony brake
They won fresh fields; and now, when came around
The thirteenth harvest, and the grain was ripe
On that new land, my grandsire, then a boy,
One morn came leaping, shouting, from the field.
High in his hand he held a stalk of wheat,
And round the ripened ear, between the beards,
Hung, like a miracle, the wedding-ring!
And father heard great-grandam say it shone
So wonderful, she dropped upon her knees;
She thought God's finger touched it, giving back.
Who knows what fish may pounce on Brita's brooch
Before it reach the bottom of the fiord,
And then, what fisher net the fish?" Some there
Began to smile at this, and Per's blue eyes
Danced with a cheerful light, as, in the cove
Of Ulvik entered, fell his sagging sail.
No more spake Brita; homeward up the hill
She walked alone, sobbing with grief and dread.

The world goes round: the sun sets on despair,
The morrow makes it hope. Each little life
Thinks the great axle of the universe
Turns on its fate, and finds impertinence
In joy or grief conflicting with its own.
Yet fate is woven from unnoted threads;
Each life is centred in the life of all,
And from the meanest root some fibre runs
Which chance or destiny may intertwine
With those that feed a force or guiding thought,
To rule the world: so goes the world around.

And Brita's loss, that made all things seem dark,
Was soon outgrieved: came Anders' wedding-day
And Ragnil's, and the overshining joy
Of these two hearts from others drove the shade.
Forth from her home the ruddy bride advanced,
Not fair, but made so by her bridal bliss,
The tall crown on her brow, and in her hand
The bursting nosegay: Anders, washed and sleeked,
With ribbons on his hat, from head to foot
Conscious of all he wore, each word he spake,
And every action for the day prescribed,
Stuck to her side. It was a trying time;
But when the strange truth was declared at last
That they were man and wife, so greeted with
The cries of flute and fiddle, crack of guns,
And tossing of the blossom-brightened hats,
They breathed more freely; and the guests were glad

That this was over, since the festival
Might now begin, and mirth be lord of all.
In Ragnil's father, Halfdan's home, the casks
Of mead were tapped, the Dantzig brandy served
In small old glasses, and the platters broad,
Heaped high with salmon, cheese, and caviar,
Tempted and soothed before the heavier meal.
No guest in duty failed; and Per began —
The liquor's sting, the day's infection warm
Upon his blood — to fix his sweetheart's word,
Before some wind should blow it otherwhere.
Your hand, my Brita," stretching his, — "your hand
For all the dances: see, my heels are light!
I have a right to ask you for amends,
But ask it as a kindness." "Nay," she said,
"You have no right; but I will dance one dance
With you, as any other." "Will you then?"
He cried, and caught her sharply by the wrist:
"I'll not be 'any other,' do you hear?
I'll be the one, the only one, whose foot
Keeps time with yours, my heart the tune thereto!"
Then shouting comrades whirled him from her side,
And Ragnil called the maids, to show her stores
Of fine-spun linen, lavendered and cool
In nutwood chests, her bed and canopy
Painted with pictures of the King and Queen,
And texts from Scripture, o'er the pillows curled
Where she and Anders should that night repose.
They shut the door to keep the lads without,
Then shyly stole away; and Brita found
Alone, among the garden bushes, Lars.

His eyes enlarged and brightened as she came;
He said, in tones whose heartful sweetness made
Her pulses thrill: "I will not bind you yet:
Dance only first with me that sœter-dance
You learned on Graafell: Nils will play the air.
Then take your freedom, favor whom you will.
I shall not doubt you, now and evermore."
"But, Lars" — she said, then paused; he would not wait:
The mirthful guests drew near. "I'll keep you, then,"
He whispered; "till I needs must let you go.
This much will warm me on the windy fells,
Make sunshine of the mists, melt frost in dew,
And paint the rocks with roses." Could she turn
From that brave face, those calm, confiding eyes?
Could she, in others' sight, reject the hand
Now leading to the board? If so, too late
Decision came, for she had followed him,
And sat beside him when the horns of mead
Made their slow pilgrimage from mouth to mouth,
And while the stacks of bread sank low, the haunch
Of stall-fed ox diminished to the bone,
Till multeberries, Bergen gingerbread,
With wine of Spain, made daintier end of all.
Then, like a congress of the blackbirds, held

In ancient tree-tops on October eves,
The tables rang and clattered; but, erelong,
Brisk hands had stripped them bare, and, turning down
The leaves, made high-backed settles by the wall.

Through all the bustle and the din were heard
The fiddle-strings of Nils, as one by one
They chirped and squeaked in dolorous complaint,
Until the bent ear and the testing bow
Found them accordant: then a flourish came
That scampered up and down the scale, and lapsed
In one long note that hovered like a bird,
Uncertain where to light; but so not long:
It darted soon, a lark above the fells,
And spun in eddying measures. Here a pair,
And there another, took the vacant floor,
Then Lars and Brita, sweeping in the dance
That whirled and paused, as if a mountain gust
Blew them together, tossed, and tore apart.
And ever, when the wild refrain came round,
Lars flung himself and sidewards turned in air,
Yet missed no beat of music when he fell.
"By holy Olaf!" gray-haired Halfdan cried:
"There 's not a trick we knew in good old days,
But he has caught it: so I danced myself."

Upon the sweeping circles entered Per,
Held back, at first, and partially controlled
By them who saw the current of his wrath,
And whitherward it set; but now, when slacked
The fiery pulses of the dance, he broke
Through all, and rudely thrust himself on Lars.
"Your place belongs to me," he hoarsely cried, —
"Your place and partner!" "Brita 's free to choose,"
Said Lars, "and may be bidden; but this floor
Is not your deck, nor are you captain mine:
I think your throat has made your head forget."
Lars spake the truth that most exasperates:
His words were oil on flame, and Per resolved,
So swayed by reckless anger, to defy
Then, once, and wholly. "Deck or not," said he,
"You know what right I mean: you stand where I
Allow you not: I warn you off the field!"
Lars turned to Brita: "Does he speak for you?"
She shook her head, but what with shame and fear
Said nothing: "We have danced our sœter-dance,"
He further spake, "and now I go: when next
We meet at feast, I claim another such."
"Aye, claim it, claim!" Per shouted; "but you 'll first
Try knives with me, for blood shall run between
Your words and will: where you go, I shall be."
"So be it: bid your mother bring your shroud!"
Lars answered; and he left the marriage house.
The folk of Ulvik knew, from many a tale
Of feud and fight, from still transmitted hates
And old Berserker madness in their blood,

What issue hung : but whoso came between
Marked that the mediation dwelt with her
Who stood between : if she would choose, why then,
The lover foiled forsooth must leave in peace
The lover favored, — further strife were vain.
But Lars was far upon the windy heights,
And Per beyond the skerries on the sea,
And Ragnil bustling busy as a wife,
That might have helped ; while those to Brita came,
More meddlesome than kind, who hurt each nerve
They touched for healing. What could she, but cry
In tears and anger: "Shall I seek them out,
Bestow myself on one, take pride for love,
And forfeit thus all later pride in me ?
Rather refuse them both, and on myself
Turn hate of both : their knives, i' faith! were dull
Beside your cutting tongues!" She vowed, indeed,
In moonlit midnights, when she could not sleep,
And either window framed a rival face,
That seemed to wait, with set, reproachful eyes,
To smile on neither, hold apart and off
Their fatal kindness. She repel, that drew ?
As if an open rose could will away
Its hue and scent, a lily arm its stem
With thorns, a daisy turn against the sun!

The fields were reaped ; the longer shadows thrown
From high Hardanger and the eastern range
Began to chill the vales: it was the time
When on the meadow by the lonely lake
Of Graven, from the regions round about
The young men met to hold their wrestling-match,
As since the days of Olaf they had done.
There, too, the maids came and the older folk,
Delighting in the grip of strength and skill,
The strain of sinew, stubbornness of joint,
And urge of meeting muscles. All the place
Was thronged, and loud the cheers and laughter rang
When some old champion from a rival vale
Bent before fresher arms, and from his base
Wrenched ere he knew, fell heavily to earth.
Until the sun across the fir-trees laid
His lines of level gold, they watched the bouts ;
Then strayed by twos and threes toward the sound
Of wassail in the houses and the booths.

And Brita with her Ulvik gossips went.
Once only, when a Lærdal giant brought
Sore grief upon the men of Vik, she saw
Or seemed to see, beyond the stormy ring,
The shape of Lars; but, scarce disquieted
If it were he, or if the twain were there,
(Since blood, she thought, must surely cool in time,)
She followed to the house upon the knoll
Where ever came and went, like bees about
Their hive's low doorway, groups of merry folk.

A mellow dusk already filled the room ;
The chairs were pushed aside, and on the stove,
As on a throne of painted clay, sat Nils.
Behold ! Lars waited there; and as she reached
The inner circle round the dancing-floor
He moved to meet her, and began to say
"Thanks for the last" — when from the other side
Strode Per.

The two before her, face to face
Stared at each other : Brita looked at them.
All three were pale ; and she, with faintest voice,
Remembering counsel of the tongues unkind,
Could only breathe: "I know not how to choose."
"No need !" said Lars: "I choose for you," said Per.
Then both drew off and threw aside their coats,
Their broidered waistcoats, and the silken scarves
About their necks ; but Per growled "All !" and made
His body bare to where the leathern belt
Is clasped between the breast-bone and the hip.
Lars did the same ; then, setting tight the belts,
Both turned a little: the low daylight clad
Their forms with awful fairness, beauty now
Of life, so warm and ripe and glorious, yet
So near the beauty terrible of Death.
All saw the mutual sign, and understood ;
And two stepped forth, two men with grizzled hair
And earnest faces, grasped the hooks of steel
In either's belt, and drew them breast to breast,
And in the belts made fast each other's hooks.
An utter stillness on the people fell
While this was done: each face was stern and strange
And Brita, powerless to turn her eyes,
Heard herself cry, and started : "Per, O Per!"

When those two backward stepped, all saw the flash
Of knives, the lift of arms, the instant clench
Of hands that held and hands that strove to strike :
All heard the sound of quick and hard-drawn breath,
And naught beside ; but sudden red appeared,
Splashed on the white of shoulders and of arms.
Then, thighs entwined, and all the body's force
Called to the mixed resistance and assault,
They reeled and swayed, let go the guarding clutch,
And struck out madly. Per drew back, and aimed
A deadly blow, but Lars embraced him close,
Reached o'er his shoulder and from underneath
Thrust upward, while upon his ribs the knife,
Glancing, transfixed the arm. A gasp was heard:
The struggling limbs relaxed ; and both, still bound
Together, fell upon the bloody floor.

Some forward sprang, and loosed, and lifted them
A little ; but the head of Per hung back,
With lips apart and dim blue eyes unshut,
And all the passion and the pain were gone

Forever. "Dead!" a voice exclaimed; then she,
Like one who stands in darkness, till a blaze
Of blinding lightning paints the whole broad world,
Saw, burst her stony trance, and with a cry
Of love and grief and horror, threw herself
Upon his breast, and kissed his passive mouth,
And loud lamented: "Oh, too late I know
I love thee best, my Per, my sweetheart Per!
Thy will was strong, thy ways were masterful;
I did not guess that love might so command!
Thou wert my ruler: I resisted thee,
But blindly: Oh, come back! — I will obey."

Within the breast of Lars the heart beat on,
Yet faintly, as a wheel more slowly turns
When summer drouth has made the streamlet thin.
They staunched the gushing life; they raised him up,
And sense came back and cleared his clouded eye
At Brita's voice. He tried to stretch his hand:
"Where art thou, Brita? It is time to choose:
Take what is left of him or me!" He paused:
She did not answer. Stronger came his voice:
"I think that I shall live: forget all this!
'T was not my doing, shall not be again,
If only thou wilt love me as I love."
"I love thee?" Brita cried; "who murderest him
I loved indeed! Why should I wish thee life,
Except to show thee I can hate instead?"
A groan so deep, so desperate and sad
Came from his throat, that men might envy him
Who lay so silent; then they bore him forth,
While others smoothed the comely limbs of Per.
His mother, next, unrolled the decent shroud
She brought with her, as ancient custom bade,
To do him honor: for man's death he died,
Not shameful straw-death of the sick and old.

BOOK II

Lars lived, because the life within his frame
Refused to leave it; but his heart was dead,
He thought, for nothing moved him any more.
He spake not Brita's name, and every path
Where he had scattered fancies of the maid
Like seeds of flowers, but whence, instead, had grown
Malignant briers, to clog and tear his feet,
Was hated now: so, all that once seemed life,
So bright with power and purpose, rich in chance,
And dropping rest from every cloud of toil,
Became a weariness of empty days.

Thus, not to 'scape the blood-revenge for Per
Which Thorsten vowed, his brother: not to shun
The tongues and eyes of censure or reproach,

Or spoken pity, angering more than these;
But since each rock upon the lonely fell
Kept echoes of her voice, each cleft of blue
Where valleys wandered downward to the wave
Held shadows of her form, each meadow-sod
Her footprints, — all the land so filled with her,
Once hope, delight, but desolation now, —
Forth must he go, beyond his father's hearth,
Beyond the vales, beyond the teeth of snow,
The shores and skerries, till the world become
Too wide for knowledge of his evil fate,
Too strange for memory of his ruined love!

He recked not where; but into passive moods
Some spirit drops a leaven, to point anew
Men's aimless forces. Was it only chance
That now recalled a long-forgotten tale?
How Leif, his mother's grandsire, crossed the seas
To those new lands the great Gustavus claimed:
How, in The Key of old Calmâr, their ship,
A trooper he, with Printz the Governor,
Sailed days and weeks; the blue would never turn
To shallower green, and landsmen moped in dread,
Till shores grew up they scarce believed were such,
Low-lying, fresh, as if the hand of God
Had lately finished them. But farther on
The curving bay to one broad river led,
Where cabins nestled on their rising banks,
With mighty woods, and mellow intervales,
Inviting corn and cattle. Then rejoiced
The Swedish farmers, and were set ashore:
But on the level isle of Tinicum
Printz built a fort, and there the trooper, Leif,
Abode three years: and he was fain to tell,
When wounds and age had crippled him, how fair
And fruitful was the land, how full of sun
And bountiful in streams, — and pity 't was
The strong Norse blood could not have stocked it all!

Lars knew not why these stories should return
To haunt his gloomy brain: but it was so,
And on the current of his memory launched
His thought, and followed; then neglected will
Awoke, and on the track of thought embarked,
And soon his life was borne away from all
It knew, and burst the adamantine ring
Which bound its world within the greater world.
As one who, wandering by the water-side,
Steps in an empty boat, and sits him down,
Not knowing that his step has loosed the chain,
And drifts away, unwitting, on the tide,
So he was drifted: no farewell he spake,
But happy Ulvik and the fiord and fell
Passed from his eyes, and underneath his feet
The world went round, until he found himself,
Like one aroused from sleep, upon the hills
That roll, the heavings of the boundless blue.

As unto Leif, his mother's grandsire, so
To him it seemed the blue would never turn
To shallower green, till shining fisher-sails
Came, stars of land that rose before the land;
Then fresher shores and climbing river-banks,
And broken woods and mellow intervales,
With houses, corn, and cattle. There, perchance,
He dreamed, the memory of Leif might bide
Upon the level isle of Tinicum,
Or farms of Swedish settlers: if 't were so,
One stone was laid whereon to build a home.
But when the vessel at the city's wharf
Dropped anchor, and the bright new land was won,
The high red houses and the sober throngs
Were strange to him, and strange the garb and speech.
Awhile he lingered there; until, outgrown
The tongue's first blindness and the stranger's shame,
His helpless craft was turned again to use.

Then sought he countrymen, and, finding now
Within the Swedish Church at Weccacoe
No Norse but in the features, else all changed,
He left and wandered down the Delaware
Unto the isle of Tinicum; and there
Of all that fortress of the valiant Printz
Some yellow bricks remained. The name of Leif
Who should remember? Do we call to mind,
Years afterward, the clover-head we plucked
Some morn of June, and smelled, and threw away?
But when we find a life erased and lost
Beneath the multitude's unsparing feet, —
A life so clearly beating yet for us
In blood and memory, — comes a sad surprise:
So Lars went onward, losing hope of good,
To where, upon her hill, fair Wilmington
Looks to the river over marshy meads.
He saw the low brick church, with stunted tower,
The portal-arches, ivied now and old,
And passed the gate: lo! there, the ancient stones
Bore Norland names and dear, familiar words!
It seemed the dead a comfort spake: he read,
Thrusting the nettles and the vines aside,
And softly wept: he knew not why he wept,
But here was something in the strange new land
That made a home, though growing out of graves.

Led by a faith that rest could not be far,
Beyond the town, where deeper vales bring down
The winding brooks from Pennsylvanian hills,
He walked: the ordered farms were fair to see
And fair the peaceful houses: old repose
Mellowed the lavish newness of the land,
And sober toil gave everywhere the right
To simple pleasures. As by each he passed,
A spirit whispered: "No, not there!" and then
His sceptic heart said: "Never anywhere!"

The sun was low, when, with the valley's bend,
There came a change. Two willow-fountains flung
And showered their leafy streams before a house
Of rusty stone, with chimneys tall and white;
A meadow stretched below; and dappled cows,
Full-fed, were waiting for their evening call.
The garden lay upon a sunny knoll,
An orchard dark behind it, and the barn,
With wide, warm wings, a giant mother-bird,
Seemed brooding o'er its empty summer nest.
Then Lars upon the roadside bank sat down,
For here was peace that almost seemed despair,
So near his eyes, so distant from his life
It lay: and while he mused, a woman came
Forth from the house, no servant-maid more plain
In her attire, yet, as she nearer drew,
Her still, sweet face, and pure, untroubled eyes
Spake gentle blood. A browner dove she seemed,
Without the shifting iris of the neck,
And when she spake her voice was like a dove's,
Soft, even-toned, and sinking in the heart.
Lars could not know that loss and yearning made
His eyes so pleading; he but saw how hers
Bent on him as some serious angel's might
Upon a child, strayed in the wilderness.
She paused, and said: "Thou seemest weary, friend,"
But he, instead of answer, clasped his hands.
The silent gesture wrought upon her mind.
She marked the alien face; then, with a smile
That meant and made excuse for needful words,
She said: "Perhaps thou dost not understand?"
"I understand," Lars answered; "you are good.
Indeed, I 'm weary: not in hands and feet,
But tired of idly owning them. I see
A thousand fields where I could take my bread
Nor stint the harvest, and a thousand roofs
That shelter corners where my head might rest,
Nor steal another's pillow!"

As to seek
The meaning of his words, she mused a space.
In that still land of homes, how should she guess
What fancies haunt a homeless heart? Yet his
Was surely need: so, presently, she spake:
"Work only waits, I 've thought, for willing hands;
A meal and shelter for the night, we give
To all that ask; what more is possible
Rests with my father." Lars arose and went
Beside her, where the cows came loitering on
With udders swelled, and meadow-scented breath,
Through opened bars and up the grassy lane.
"Ho, Star!" and "Pink!" he called them coaxingly
In soft Norse words: they stared as if they knew.
"See, lady!" then he cried: "the honest things
Like him that likes them, over all the world."
But "Nay," she said, "not 'lady'!—call me Ruth:

My father's name is Ezra Mendenhall,
And hither comes he: I will speak for thee."

So Lars was sheltered, and when evening fell,
And all, around the clean and peaceful board,
Kept the brief silence which is fittest prayer
Before the bread is broken, he was filled
With something calm which was akin to peace,
With something restless, which was almost hope.
The white-haired man with placid forehead sat
And faced him, grave as any Bergen judge,
Yet kindly; he the stranger's claim allowed,
And ample space for hunger, ere he spake:
"What, then, might be thy name?" "My name is Lars,
The son of Thorsten, in the Norway land.
My father said the blood of heathen kings
Runs in our veins, but we are Christian men,
Who work the more because of idle sires,
And speak the truth, and try to live good lives."

Lars ceased, as if a blow had closed his mouth,
But Ezra said: "The name sounds heathenish,
Indeed, yet hardly royal; blood is naught to us,
Yea, less than naught, or I, whose fathers served
The third man Edward, and his kindly wife,
Philippa, loved the vanities of courts
And cast away the birthright of their souls,
Were now, perchance, a worldly popinjay,
The Lord forgetting and provoking Him
Me to forget. But this is needless talk:
Thy hands declare that thou art bred to work;
Thy face, methinks, is truthful; if thy life
Be good, I know not. I can trust no more
Than knowledge justifies, and charity
Bids us assume until the knowledge comes."

"No more I ask," Lars answered; "simple ways
To me are home-ways: I can learn to serve,
Because, when others served me, I was just."

"Our ways are strange to thee," said Ezra; "thine
Unsuitable, if here too long retained.
The just in spirit find in outward things
A voice and testimony, which may not
Be lightly changed: what sayest thou to this?"

"To change in mine? Why, truly, 't were no change
To do thy bidding, yet to call thee friend;
To use the speech of brethren, as at home;
And, feigning not the faith that still may part,
To bide in charity till knowledge comes, —
So much, without a promise, I should give."

"Thou speakest fairly," Ezra said; "to me
Is need of labor less than faithful will,
But this includes the other: if thou stand

The easier test, the greater then may come.
The man who feels his duty makes his own
The beasts he tends or uses, and the fields,
Though all may be another's." "Then," said Ruth,
"My cows already must belong to Lars:
His speech was strange, and yet they understood."

So Lars remained. That night, beneath the roof,
His head lay light; the very wind that breathed
Its low, perpetual wail among the boughs
Sufficed to cheer him, and the one dim star
That watched him from the highest heaven of heavens
Made morning in his heart. Too soon passed off
The exalted mood, too soon his rich content
Was tarnished by the daily round of toil,
And all things grown familiar; yet his pride,
That rose at censure for each petty fault
Of ignorance, supported while it stung.
And Ezra Mendenhall was just, and Ruth
Serenely patient, sweetly calm and kind:
So, month by month, the even days were born
And died, the nights were drowned in deeper rest,
And fields and fences, streams and stately woods,
Fashioned themselves to suit his newer life,
Till ever fainter grew those other forms
Of fiord and fell, the high Hardanger range,
And Romsdal's teeth of snow. Yea, Brita's eyes
And Per's hot face he learned to hold away,
Save when they vexed his helpless soul in dreams.

The land was called Hockessin. O'er its hills,
High, wide, and fertile, blew a healthy air:
There was a homestead set wherever fell
A sunward slope, and breathed its crystal vein,
And up beyond the woods, at crossing roads,
The heart of all, the ancient meeting-house;
And Lars went thither on an autumn morn.
Beside him went, it happened, Abner Cloud,
A neighbor; rigid in the sect, and rich,
And it was rumored that he crossed the hill
To Ezra's house, oftener than neighbor-wise.
This knew not Lars: but Abner's eye, he thought,
Fell not upon him as a friend's should fall,
And Abner's tongue perplexed him, for its tone
Was harsh or sneering when his words were fair.
He spake from every quarter, as a man
Who seeks a tender spot, or wound unhealed,
And probes the surface which he seems to soothe
Until some nerve betrays infirmity.
This, only, were the two alone: if Ruth
Came near, his face grew mild as curded milk,
And unctuous kindness overflowed his lips
Precise and thin, as who should godlier be?
Perhaps he wooed, but 't was a wooing strange,
Lars fancied, or his heart were other stuff
Than those are made of which can bless or slay.

It was a silent meeting. Here the men
And there the women sat, the elder folk
Facing the younger from their rising seats,
With faces grave beneath the stiff, straight brim
Or dusky bonnet. They the stillness breathed
Like some high air wherein their souls were free,
And on their features, as on those that guard
The drifted portals of Egyptian fanes,
Sat mystery: the Spirit they obeyed
By voice or silence, as the influence fell,
Was near them, or their common seeking made
A spiritual Presence, mightier than the grasp
Of each, possessed in reverence by all.
But o'er the soul of Lars there lay the shade
Of his own strangeness: peace came not to him.
Awhile he idly watched the flies that crawled
Along the hard, bare pine, or marked, in front,
The close-cut hair and flaring lobes of ears,
Until his mind turned on itself, and made
A wizard twilight, where the shapes of life
Shone forth and faded: subtler sense awoke,
But dream-like first, and then the form of Per
Became a living presence which abode;
And all the pain and trouble of the past
Threatened like something evil yet to come.
At last, that phantasm of his memory sat
Beside him, and would not be banished thence
By will or prayer: he lifted up his face,
And met the cold gray eyes of Abner Cloud.

The man, thenceforward, seemed an enemy,
And Ruth, he scarce knew why, but all her ways
So cheered and soothed, a power to subjugate
The devil in his heart. But now the leaves
Flashed into glittering jewels ere they fell;
The pastures lessened, and, when day was done
Came quiet evenings, bare of tale and song,
Such as beneath Norwegian rafters shook
Tired lids awake; and wearisome to Lars,
Till Ruth, who noted, fetched the useless books
Of school-girl days, and portioned him his task,
Herself the teacher. Oft would Ezra smile
To note her careful and unyielding sway.
"Nay, now," he said; "I thought our speech was plain,
But thou dost hedge each common phrase with thorns,
Like something rare: dost thou not make it hard?"
"A right foundation, father," she replied,
"Makes easy building: thus it is in life.
I teach thee, Lars, no other than the Lord
Requires of all, through discipline that makes
His goodness hard until it lives in us."
With paler cheeks Lars turned him to his task,
Thus innocently smitten; but his mind
Increased in knowledge, till the alien tongue
Obeyed the summons of his thought. So toil
Brought freedom, and the winter passed away.

Where Lars was blind, the eyes of Abner Cloud
Saw more than was. This school-boy giant drew,
He fancied, like a rank and chance-sown weed
Beside some wholesome plant, the strength away
From his desire, of old and rightful root.
'T was not that Ruth should love the stranger, — no!
But woman's interest is lightly caught,
So hers by Lars, that might have turned to him.
Had he not worldly goods, and honest name,
And birthright in the meeting? Who could weigh
Unknown with these deserts? — but gentleness
Is blind, and goodness ignorant; so he,
By malice made sagacious, learned to note
The large, strong veins that filled and rose, although
The tongue was still, the clench of powerful hands,
The trouble hiding in the gloomy eye,
And wrought on these by cunning words. But most
He played with forms of Scandinavian faith
In that old time before King Olaf came,
And made their huge, divine barbarities,
Their strength and slaughter, fields of frost and blood,
More hideous. "These are fables, thou wilt claim,"
It was his wont to say; "but such must nurse
A people false and cruel."

Then would Lars
Reply with heat: "Not so! but honest folk, instead,
Too frank to hide the face of any fault,
And free from all the evil crafts that breed
In hearts of cowards!"

Ruth, it rarely chanced,
Heard aught of this, but when she heard, her voice
Came firm and clear: "Indeed, it is not good
To drag those times forth from their harmless graves.
Their ignorance and wicked strength are dead,
And what of good they knew was not their own,
But ours as well: this is our sole concern,
To feed the life of goodness in ourselves
And all, that so the world at last escape
The darkness of our fathers far away."

As when some malady within the frame
Is planted, slowly tainting all the blood,
And underneath the seeming healthy skin
In secret grows till strong enough to smite
With rank disorder, so the strife increased;
And Lars perceived the devil of his guilt
Had made a darkness, where he ambushed lay
And waited for his time. Against him rose
The better knowledge, breeding downy wings
Of prayer, yet shaken by mistrust and hate
At touch of Abner's malice. Thus the hour,
The inevitable, came.

A Sabbath morn
Of early spring lay lovely on the land.
Upon the bridge that to the barn's broad floor
Led from the field, stood Lars: his eyes were fixed
Upon his knife, and, as he turned the blade
This way and that, and with it turned his thought,
While musing if 't were best to cover up
This witness, or to master what it told,
Close to the haft he marked a splash of rust,
And shuddered as he held it nearer. "Blood,
And doubtless human!" spake a wiry voice,
And Abner Cloud bent down his head to look.
A sound of waters filled the ears of Lars
And all his flesh grew chill: he said no word.
"I have thy history, now," thought Abner Cloud,
And in the pallid silence read but fear;
So thus aloud: "Thou art a man of crime,
The proper offspring of the godless tribes,
Who drank from skulls, and gnawed the very bones
Of them they slew. This is thine instrument,
And thou art hungering for its bloody use.
Say, hast thou ever eaten human flesh?"

Then all the landscape, house, and trees, and hills,
Before the eyes of Lars, burned suddenly
In crimson fire: the roaring of his ears
Became a thunder, and his throat was brass.
Yet one wild pang of deadly fear of self
Shot through his heart, and with a mighty cry
Of mingled rage, resistance, and appeal,
He flung his arms towards heaven, and hurled afar
The fatal knife. This saw not Abner Cloud:
But death he saw within those dreadful eyes,
And turned and fled. Behind him bounded Lars,
The man cast off, the wild beast only left,
The primal savage, who is born anew
In every child. Not long had been the race,
But Ezra Mendenhall, approaching, saw
The danger, swiftly thrust himself between,
And Lars, whose passion-blinded eyes beheld
An obstacle, that only, struck him down.
Then deadly hands he dashed at Abner's throat,
But they were grasped: he heard the cry of Ruth,
Not what she said: he heard her voice, and stood.

She knew not what she said: she only saw
The wide and glaring eyes suffused with blood,
The stiff-drawn lips that, parting, showed the teeth,
And on the temples every standing vein
That throbbed, dumb voices of destroying wrath.
The soul that filled her told her what to do:
She dropped his hands and softly laid her own
Upon his brow, then looked the devil down
Within his eyes, till Lars was there again.
Erelong he trembled, while, o'er all his frame
A sweat of struggle and of agony

Brake forth, and from his throat a husky sob.
He tried to speak, but the dry tongue refused;
He could but groan, and staggered toward the house,
As walks a man who neither hears nor sees.

With bloodless lips of fear gasped Abner Cloud:
"A murderer!" as Ezra Mendenhall
Came, stunned, and with a wound across his brow.
"Oh, never!" Ruth exclaimed; but she was pale.
She bound her father's head; she gave him drink;
She steadied him with arms of gentle strength,
Then spake to Abner: "Now, I pray thee, go!"
No more: but such was her authority
Of speech and glance, the spirit and the power,
That he obeyed, and turned, and left the place.

Then Ezra's strength came back; and "Ruth," he said,
"I see thou hast a purpose: let me know!"
"I only feel," she answered, "that a soul
Is here in peril, but the way to help
Is not made plain: the knowledge will be given."
"I have no fear for thee, my daughter: do
What seemeth good, and strongly brought upon
Thy mind by plain direction of the Lord!
There is a power of evil in the man
That might be purged, if once he saw the light."

She left him, seated in the sunny porch:
Within the house and orchard all was still,
Nor found she Lars, at first. But she was driven
By that vague purpose which was void of form,
And climbed, at last, to where his chamber lay,
Beneath the rafters. On the topmost step
He sat, his forehead bent upon his knees,
A bundle at his side, as when he came.
He raised his head: Ruth saw his eyes were dull,
His features cold and haggard, and his voice,
When thus he spake to her, was hoarse and strange:
"Thou need'st not tell me: I already know.
I hope thou thinkest it is hard to me.
I am a man of violence and blood,
Not meet for thy pure company; and now
When unto peaceful ways my heart inclined,
And thou hadst shown the loveliness of good,
My guilt, not yet atoned, brings other guilt
To drive me forth: and this disgrace is worst."

Ruth stood below him where he sat: she laid
One hand upon the hand upon his knee,
And spake: "I judge thee not; I cannot know
What grievous loss or strong temptation wrought;
But if, indeed, to good and peaceful ways
Thy heart inclines, canst thou not wrestle with
The Adversary? This knowledge of thy guilt
Is half-repentance: whole would make thee sound."
"And then — and then" — his natural voice returned;

"Then — pardon?" "Pardon, now, from me and him,
My father, — for I know his perfect heart, —
Thou hast; but couldst thou turn thy dreadful strength
That so it lift, and change, and chasten thee?"
"If I but could!" — he cried, and bowed again
His forehead. "Wait!" she whispered, left him there,
And sought her father.

Now, when Ezra heard
All this repeated, for a space he sat
In earnest meditation. "Bid him come!"
He said, at last, and Ruth brought Lars to him.
Upon the doubting and the suffering face
The old man gazed; then "Put thy bundle by!"
Came from his lips; "thou shalt not leave, to-day.
Thy hands have done thee hurt; if thou art just,
One service do thyself, in following me.
Come with us to the meeting: there the Lord
Down through the silence of fraternal souls
May reach His hand. We cannot guess His ways;
Only so much the inward Voice declares."

But little else was said: upon them lay
The shadow of an unknown past, the weight
Of present trouble, the uncertainty
Of what should come; yet o'er the soul of Ruth
Hung something happier than she dared to feel,
And Lars, in silence, with submissive feet
Followed, as one who in a land of mist
Feels one side warmer, where the sun must be.
Then, parted ere they reached the separate doors,
Lars went with Ezra. Abner Cloud, within,
Beheld them enter, and he marvelled much
Such things could be. Straightway the highest seat
Took Ezra, where the low partition-boards
Sundered the men and women. There alone
Sat they whom most the Spirit visited,
And spake through them, and gave authority.

Then silence fell; how long, Lars could not know,
Nor Ruth, for each was in a trance of soul,
Till Ezra rose. His words, at first, were few
And broken, and they trembled on his lips;
But soon the power and full conviction came,
And then, as with Ezekiel's trumpet-voice
He spake: "Lo! many vessels hath the Lord
Set by the fount of Evil in our hearts.
Here envy and false-witness catch the green,
There pride the purple, lust the ruddy stream:
But into anger runs the natural blood,
And flows the faster as 't is tapped the more.
Here lies the source: the conquest here begins,
Then meekness comes, good-will, and purity.
Let whoso weigh, when his offence is sore,
The Lord's offences, and his patience mete,
Though myriads less in measure, by the Lord's!

This yoke is easy, if in love ye bear.
For none, the lowest, rather hates than loves;
But Love is shy, and Hate delights to show
A brazen forehead; 't is the noblest sign
Of courage, and the rarest, to reveal
The tender evidence of brotherhood.
With one this sin is born, with other, that;
Who shall compare them? — either sin is dark,
But one redeeming Light is over both.
The Evil that assails resist not ye
With equal evil! — else ye change to man
The Lord within, whom ye should glorify
By words that prove Him, deeds that bless like Him!
What spake the patient and the holy Christ?
Unto thy brother first be reconciled,
Then bring thy gift! and further: Bless ye them
That curse you, and do good to them that hate
And persecute, that so the children ye may be
Of Him, the Father. Yea, His perfect love
Renewed in us, and of our struggles born,
Gives, even on earth, His pure, abiding peace.
Behold, these words I speak are nothing new,
But they are burned with fire upon my mind
To help — the Lord permit that they may save!"

Therewith he laid his hat aside, and all
Beheld the purple welt across his brow,
And marvelled. Thus he prayed: "Our God and Lord
And Father, unto whom our secret sins
Lie bare and scarlet, turn aside from them
In holy pity, search the tangled heart
And breathe Thy life upon its seeds of good!
Thou leavest no one wholly dark: Thou giv'st
The hope and yearning where the will is weak,
And unto all the blessed strength of love.
So give to him, and even withhold from me
Thy gifts designed, that he receive the more:
Give love that pardons, prayer that purifies,
And saintly courage that can suffer wrong,
For these beget Thy peace, and keep Thee near!"

He ceased: all hearts were stirred; and suddenly
Amid the younger members Lars arose,
Unconscious of the tears upon his face,
And scarcely audible: "Oh, brethren here,
He prayed for my sake, for my sake pray ye!
I am a sinful man: I do repent.
I see the truth, but in my heart the lamp
Is barely lighted, any wind may quench.
Bear with me still, be helpful, that I live!"
Then all not so much wondered but they felt
The man's most earnest need; and many a voice
Responsive murmured: "Yea, I will!" and some,
Whose brows were tombstones over passions slain,
When meeting broke came up and took his hand.

The three walked home in silence, but to Lars
The mist had lifted, and around him fell
A bath of light; and dimly spread before
His feet the sweetness of a purer world.
When Ezra, that diviner virtue spent
Which held him up, grew faint upon the road,
The arm of Lars became a strength to him;
Yet all he said, before the evening fell,
Was: "Gird thy loins, my friend, the way is long
And wearisome: haste not, but never rest!"

"I will not close mine eyes," said Lars to Ruth,
And laid aside the book, *No Cross, No Crown*,
She gave him as a comfort and a help;
"Till thou hast heard the tale I have to tell.
Thou speakest truth, the knowledge of my sin
Is half-repentance, yet the knowledge burns
Like fire in ashes till it be confessed.
Revoke thy pardon, if it must be so,
When all is told: yea, speak to me no more,
But I must speak!" So he began, and spared
No circumstance of love, and hate, and crime,
The songs and dances which the Friends forbid,
The bloody customs and the cries profane,
Till all lay bare and horrible. And Ruth
Grew pale and flushed by turns, and often wept,
And, when he ceased, was silent. "Now, farewell!"
He would have said, when she looked up and spake:
"Thy words have shaken me: we read such tales,
Nor comprehend, so distant and obscure:
Thou makest manifest the living truth.
Save thee, I never knew a man of blood:
Thou shouldst be wicked, and my heart declares
Thy gentleness: ah, feeling all thy sin,
Can I condemn thee, nor myself condemn?
Thy burden, thus, is laid upon me. Pray
For power and patience, pray for victory!
Then falls the burden, and my soul is glad."

Lars saw what he had done. His limbs unstrung
Gave way, and softly on his knees he sank,
And all the passion of his nature bore
His yearning upward, till in faith it died.
He rose, at last; his face was calm and strong:
Ruth smiled, and then they parted for the night.

Yet Ezra's words were true: the way was long
And wearisome. The better will was there,
But not the trust in self; for, still beside
Those pleasant regions opening on his soul,
Beat the unyielding blood, as beats afar
The vein of lightning in a summer cloud.
And, as in each severe community
Of interests circumscribed, where all is known
And roughly handled till opinions join,
So, here were those who kindly turned to Lars,

And those who doubted, or declared him false.
In this probation, Ruth became his stay:
She knew and turned not, knew and yet believed
As did no other, — hoping more than he.
Meanwhile the summer and the harvest came.
One afternoon, within the orchard, Ruth
Gathered the first sweet apples of the year,
That give such pleasure by their painted cheeks
And healthy odor. Little breezes shook
The interwoven flecks of sun and shade,
O'er all the tufted carpet of the grass;
The birds sang near her, and beyond the hedge,
Where stretched the oat-field broad along the hill,
Were harvest voices, broken wafts of sound,
That brought no words. Then something made her start;
She gazed and waited: o'er the thorny wall
Lars leaped, or seemed to fly, and ran to her,
His features troubled and his hands outstretched.
"O Ruth!" he cried; "I pray thee, take my hands!
This power I have, at last: I can refrain
Till help be sought, the help that dwells in thee."
She took his hands, and soon, in kissing palms,
His violent pulses learned the beat of hers.
Sweet warmth o'erspread his frame; he saw her face,
And how the cheeks flushed and the eyelids fell
Beneath his gaze, and all at once the truth
Beat fast and eager in the palms of both.
"Take not away;" he cried: "now, nevermore,
Thy hands! O Ruth, my saving angel, give
Thyself to me, and let our lives be one!
I cannot spare thee: heart and soul alike
Have need of thee, and seem to cry aloud:
'Lo! faith and love and holiness are one!'"
But who shall paint the beauty of her eyes
When they unveiled, and softly clung to his,
The while she spake: "I think I loved thee first
When first I saw thee, and I give my life,
In perfect trust and faith, to these thy hands."
"The fight is fought," said Lars; "so blest by thee,
The strength of darkness and temptation dies.
If now the light must reach me through thy soul,
It is not clouded: clearer were too keen,
Too awful in its purity, for man."

So into joy revolved the doubtful year,
And, ere it closed, the gentle fold of Friends
Sheltered another member, even Lars.
The evidence of faith, in words and ways,
Could none reject, and thus opinions joined,
And that grew natural which was marvel first.
Then followed soon, since Ezra willed it so,
Seeing that twofold duty guided Ruth,
The second marvel, bitterness to one
Who blamed his haste, nor felt how free is fate,
Whose sweeter name is love, of will or plan.
And all the country-side assembled there,

One winter Sabbath, when in snow and sky
The colors of transfiguration shone,
Within the meeting-house. There Ruth and Lars
Together sat upon the women's side,
And when the peace was perfect, they arose.
He took her by the hand, and spake these words,
As ordered: "In the presence of the Lord
And this assembly, by the hand I take
Ruth Mendenhall, and promise unto her,
Divine assistance blessing me, to be
A loving and faithful husband, even
Till death shall separate us." Then spake Ruth
The same sweet words; and so the twain were one.

BOOK III

Love's history, as Life's, is ended not
By marriage: though the ignorant Paradise
May then be lost, the world of knowledge waits,
With ample opportunities, to mould
Young Eve and Adam into wife and man.
Some grace of sentiment expires, yet here
The nobler poetry of life begins:
The squire is knight, the novice takes the vow,
Old service falls, new powers and duties join,
And that high Beauty, which is crown of all,
No more a lightsome maid, with tresses free
And mantle floating from the bosom bare,
Confronts us now like holy Barbara,
As Palma drew, or she, Our Lady, born
On Melos, type of perfect growth and pure.

So Lars and Ruth beside each other learned
What neither, left unwedded, could have won:
He how reliant and how fond the heart
Whose love seemed almost pity, she how firm
And masterful the nature, which appealed
There for support where hers had felt no strain;
And both, how solemn, sweet, and wonderful
The life of man. Their life, indeed, was still,
Too still for aught save blessing, for a time.
All things were ordered: plenty in the house
And fruitfulness of field and meadow made
Light labor, and the people came and went,
According to their old and friendly ways.
Within the meeting-house upon the hill
Now Ezra oftener spake, and sometimes Lars,
Fain to obey the spirit which impelled;
And what of customed phrase they missed, or tone,
Unlike their measured chant, did he supply
With words that bore a message to the heart.

All this might seem sufficient; yet to Ruth
Was still unrest, where, unto shallow eyes

Dwelt peace; she felt the uneasy soul of Lars,
And waited, till his own good time should come.
Yea, verily, he was happy: could she doubt
The signs in him that spake the same in her?
Yea, he was happy: every day proclaimed
The freshness of a blessing rebestowed,
The conscious gift, unworn by time or use,
And this was sweet to see; yet he betrayed
That wavering will, the opposite of faith,
Which comes of duty known and not performed.
It seemed his lines of life were cast in peace,
In green Hockessin, where Lars Thorstensen,
A sound that echoed of Norwegian shores,
Became Friend Thurston: all things there conspired
To blot the Past, but in his soul it lived.

Then, as his thoughts went back, his tongue revealed:
He spake of winding fiord and windy fell,
Of Ulvik's cottages and Graven's lake,
And all the moving features of a life
So strange to Ruth; till she made bold to break,
Through playful chiding, what was grave surmise:
"I fear me, Lars, that thou art sick for home.
Thy love is with me and thy memory far:
Thou seest with half thy sight; and in thy dreams
I hear thee murmur in thine other tongue,
So soft and strange, so good, I cannot doubt,
If I but knew it; but thy dreams are safe."
"Nay, wife," he said; "misunderstand them not!
For dreams hold up before the soul, released
From worldly business, pictures of itself,
And in confused and mystic parables
Foreshadow what it seeks. I do confess
I love Old Norway's bleak, tremendous hills,
Where winter sits, and sees the summer burn
In valleys deeper than yon cloud is high:
I love the ocean-arms that gleam and foam
So far within the bosom of the land:
It is not that. I do confess to thee
I love the frank, brave habit of the folk,
The hearts unspoiled, though fed from ruder times
And filled with angry blood: I love the tales
That taught, the ancient songs that cradled me,
The tongue my mother spake, unto the Lord
As sweet as thine upon the lips of prayer:
It is not that."

Then he perused her face
Full earnestly, and drew a deeper breath.
"My wife, my Ruth," his words came, low yet firm;
"Thou knowest of one who brake a precious box
Of ointment, and refreshed the weary feet
Of Him who pardoned her. But, had He given
Not pardon only, had He stretched His arm
And plucked, as from the vine of Paradise,
All blessing and all bounty and all good,
What then were she that idly took and used?"

"I read thy meaning," answered Ruth; "speak on!"
"Am I not he that idly uses? Are there not
Here many reapers, there a wasting field?
In them the fierce inheritance of blood
I overcame, is mighty still to slay;
For ancient custom is a ring of steel
They know not how to snap. By day and night
A powerful spirit calls me: 'Go to them!'
What should mine answer to the spirit be?"

If there were aught of struggle in her heart,
She hid the signs. A little pale her cheek,
But with untrembling eyelids she upraised
Her face to his, and took him by the hands:
"Thy Lord is mine: what should I say to thee,
Except what she, whose name I bear, ere yet
She went to glean in Bethlehem's harvest-field,
Said to Naomi: 'Nay, entreat me not
To leave thee, or return from following thee?'
Should not thy people, then, be mine,
As mine are made thine own? I will not fail: He calls
On both of us who gives thee this command."

So Ruth, erelong, detached her coming life
From all its past, until each well-known thing
No more was sure or needful, to her mind.
Her neighbors, even, seemed to come and go
Like half-existences; her days, as well,
Were clad with dream; she understood the words,
"I but sojourn among you for a time,"
And, from the duties which were habits, turned
To brood o'er those unknown, awaiting her.

But Ezra, when he heard their purpose, spake
"Because this thing is very hard to me,
I dare not preach against it; but I doubt,
Being acquainted with the heart of man.
'T is one thing, Lars, to build thy virtue here,
Where others urge the better will: but there,
Alone, persuaded, ridiculed, assailed,
Couldst thou resist, yet love them? Nay, I know
Thy power and conscience: Try them not too soon;
Is all I ask. See, I am full of years,
And thou, my daughter, thou, indeed a son,
Stay me on either side: wait but awhile
And ye are free, yea, seasoned as twin beams
Of soundest oak, for lintels of His door."

They patiently obeyed. The years went by,
Until five winters blanched to perfect snow
The old man's hair. Then, when the gusts of March
Shook into life the torpid souls of trees,
His body craved its rest. He summoned Lars,
And meekly said: "I pray thee, pardon me
That I have lived so long: I meant it not.
Now I am certain that the end is near;

And, noting as I must, the deep concern
On both your minds, I fain would aid that work,
The which, I see, ye mean to undertake."
Then counsel wise he gave: it seemed his mind,
Those five long years, had pondered all things well,
Computed every chance and sought the best,
Foresaw and weighed, foreboded and prepared,
Until the call was made his legacy.
At last he said: "My sight is verily clear,
And I behold your duty as yourselves;"
Then spake farewell with pleasant voice, and died.

When summer came, upon an English ship
Sailed Lars and Ruth between the rich green shores
That widened, sinking, till the land was drowned,
And they were blown on rolling fields of blue.
Blown backward more than on; and evil eyes
Of sailors on their sober Quaker garb
Began to turn. "Our Jonah!" was the cry,
When Lars was seen upon the quarter-deck,
And one, a ruffian from the Dorset moors,
Became so impudent and foul of tongue
That Ruth was frightened, would have fled below,
But Lars prevented her. Three strides he made,
Then by the waistband and the neck he seized
That brutish boor, and o'er the bulwarks held,
Above the brine, like death for very fear.
"Now, promise me to keep a decent tongue!"
Cried Lars; and he: "I promise anything,
But let me not be lost!" Thenceforth respect
Those sailors showed to strength, though clad in peace.
"Now see I wherefore thou wert made so strong,"
Ruth said to him, and inwardly rejoiced;
And soon the mists and baffling breezes fled
Before a wind that down from Labrador
Blew like a will unwearied, night and day,
Across the desert of the middle sea.
Out of the waters rose the Scilly Isles,
Afar and low, and then the Cornish hills,
And, floating up by many a valley-mouth
Of Devon streams, they came to Bristol town.

Awhile among their brethren they abode,
For thus had Ezra ordered. There were some
Concerned in trade, whose vessels to and fro
From Hull across the German Ocean sailed,
And touched Norwegian ports; and Lars in those
The old man said, must find his nearest stay.
But soon it chanced that with a vessel came
A man of Arendal, in Norway land,
Known to the Friends as fair in word and deed,
And well-inclined; and Gustaf Hansen named.
Norse tongue makes easy friendship: Lars and he
Became as brothers in a little while,
And, when his worldly charge was ordered, they
Together all embarked for Arendal.

Calm autumn skies were o'er them, and the sea
Swelled in unwrinkled glass: they scarcely knew
How sped the voyage, until Lindesnaes,
At first a cloud, stood fast, and spread away
To flanking capes, with gaps of blue between;
Then rose, and showed, above the precipice,
The firs of Norway climbing thick and high
To wilder crests that made the inland gloom.
In front, the sprinkled skerries pierced the wave;
Between them, slowly glided in and out
The tawny sails, while houses low and red
Hailed their return, or sent them fearless forth.
"This is thy Norway, Lars; it looks like thee,"
Said Ruth: "it has a forehead firm and bold;
It sets its foot below the reach of storms,
Yet hides, methinks, in each retiring vale,
Delight in toil, contentment, love, and peace, —
My land, my husband! let me love it, too!"
So on their softened hearts the sun went down
And rose once more; then Gustaf Hansen came
Beside them, pilot of familiar shores,
And said: "To starboard, yonder, lies the isle
As I described it; here, upon our lee
Is mainland all, and there the Nid comes down,
The timber-shouldering Nid, from endless woods
And wilder valleys where scant grain is grown.
Now bend your glances as my finger points, —
Lo! there it is, the spire of Arendal!
Our little town, as homely, kind, and dear,
As some old dame, round whom her children's babes
Cling to be petted, comforted, and spoiled.
And here, my friends, shall ye with me abide
And with my Thora, till the winter melts,
Which there, beyond yon wall of slaty cloud,
Possesses fell and upland even now.
Too strange is Ruth to dare those snowy wastes,
Nor is there need: good Thora's heart will turn
To her, I know, as mine hath turned to Lars;
And Arendal is warmly-harbored, snug,
And not unfriendly in the time of storms."

They could not say him nay. The anchor dropped
Before the town, and Thora, from the land,
Tall, broad of breast, with ever-rosy cheeks
O'er which the breezes tossed her locks of gray,
Stretched arms of welcome; and the ancient house,
With massive beams and ample chimney-place,
As in Hockessin, made immediate home.
To Ruth, how sweetly the geraniums peeped
With scarlet eyes across the window-sill!
How orderly the snowy curtains shone!
Familiar, too, the plainness and the use
In all things; presses of the dusky oak,
Fair linen, store of healing herbs that smelled
Of charity, and signs of forethought wise
That justified the plenty of the house.

It was as Gustaf said: good Thora loved
The foreign woman, taught and counselled her,
Taking to heart their purpose, so that she
Unconsciously received the truth of Friends.
And Gustaf also, through the soul of Lars,
To him laid bare, and all that blessing clear
Obedience brings when speaks the inward voice,
Believed erelong; then others came to hear,
Till there, in Arendal, a brotherhood
Of earnest seekers for the light grew up,
Before the hasty spring of northern lands
Sowed buttercups along the banks of Nid.

But when they burst, those precious common flowers
That not a meadow of the world can spare,
Said Lars, one Sabbath, to the little flock:
"Here we have tarried long, and it is well;
But now we go, and it is also well.
This much is blessing added unto those
That went before; hence louder rings the call
Which brought me hither, and I must obey.
My path is clear, my duty strange and stern,
The end thereof uncertain; it may be,
My brethren, I shall never see ye more.
Your love upholds me, and your faith confirms
My purpose: bless me now, and bid farewell!"
Then Gustaf wept, and said: "Our brother, go!
Yet thou art with us, and we walk with thee
In this or yonder world, as bids the Lord."

Their needful preparations soon were made:
Two strong dun horses of the mountain breed,
With hoofs like claws, that clung where'er they touched,
Unholstered saddles, leathern wallets filled
With scrip for houseless ways, close-woven cloaks
To comfort them upon the cloudy fells,
And precious books, by Penn and Barclay writ
And Woolman, — these made up their little store.
The few and faithful went with them a space
Along the banks of Nid; there first besought
All power and light, and furtherance for the task
Awaiting Lars: they knew not what it was,
But what it was, they knew, was good: then all
Gave hands and said farewell, and Lars and Ruth
Rode boldly onward, facing the dark land.

Across the lonely hills of Tellemark,
That smiled in sunshine, went their earnest way,
And by the sparkling waters of the Tind;
Then, leaving on the left that chasm of dread
Where, under Gousta's base, the Riukan falls
In winnowing blossoms, tendrilled vines of foam,
And bursting rockets of the starry spray,
They rode through forests into Hemsedal.
The people marvelled at their strange attire,
But all were kind; and Ruth, to whom their speech

Was now familiar, found such ordered toil,
Such easy gladness, temperate desire,
That many doubts were laid: the spirit slept,
She thought, and waited but a heartsome call.
Then ever higher stood the stormy fells
Against uncertain skies, as they advanced;
And ever grander plunged the roaring snow
Of mighty waterfalls from cliff to vale:
The firs were mantled in a blacker shade,
The rocks were rusted as with ancient blood,
And winds that shouted or in wailing died
Harried the upper fields, in endless wrath
At finding there no man.

The soul of Lars
Expanded with a solemn joy; but Ruth,
Awed by the gloom and wildness of the land,
Rode close and often touched her husband's arm;
And when within its hollow dell they saw
The church of Borgund like a dragon sit,
Its roof all horns, its pitchy shingles laid
Like serpent scales, its door a dusky throat,
She whispered: "This the ancients must have left
From their abolished worship: is it so?
This is no temple of the living Lord,
That makes me fear it like an evil thing!"
"Consider not its outward form," said Lars,
"Or mine may vex thee, for my sin outgrown.
I would the dragon in the people's blood
As harmless were!" So downward, side by side,
From ridges of the windy Fille Fell
Unto the borders of the tamer brine,
The sea-arm bathing Frithiof's home, they rode;
Then two days floated past those granite walls
That mock the boatman with a softer song,
And took the land again, where shadow broods,
And frequent thunder of the tumbling rocks
Is heard the summer through, in Nærödal.
To Ruth the gorge seemed awful, and the path
That from its bowels toiled to meet the sun,
Was hard as any made for Christian's feet,
In Bunyan's dream; but Lars with lighter step
The giddy zigzag scaled, for now, beyond,
Not distant, lay the Vossevangen vale,
And all the cheerful neighborhood of home.

At last, one quiet afternoon, they crossed
The fell from Graven, and below them saw
The roofs of Ulvik and the orchard-trees
Shining in richer colors, and the fiord,
A dim blue gloom between Hardanger heights, —
The strife and peace, the plenty and the need;
And both were silent for a little space.
Then Ruth: "I had not thought thy home so fair,
Nor yet so stern and overhung with dread,
It seems to draw me as a danger draws,

Yet gives me courage: is it well with thee?"
"That which I would, I know," responded Lars,
"Not that which may be: ask no more, I pray!"
Then downward, weary, strangely moved, yet glad,
They went, a wonder to the Ulvik folk,
Till some detected, 'neath his shadowy brim,
The eyes of Lars; and he was scarcely housed
With his astonished kindred, ere the news
Spread from the fountain, ran along the shore.
For all believed him dead: in truth, the dead
Could not have risen in stranger guise than he,
Who spake as one they knew and did not know,
Who seemed another, yet must be the same.
His folk were kind: they owned the right of blood,
Nor would disgrace it, though a half-disgrace
Lars seemed to bring; but in her strange, sweet self
Ruth brought a pleasure which erelong was love.
Her gentle voice, her patient, winning ways,
Pure thought and ignorance of evil things
That on her wedlock left a virgin bloom,
Set her above them, yet her nature dwelt
In lowliness: sister and saint she seemed.

Soon Thorsten, brother of the slaughtered Per,
Alike a stalwart fisher of the fiord,
Heard who had come, and published unto all
The debt of blood he meant to claim of Lars.
"The coward, only, comes as man of peace,
To shirk such payment!" were his bitter words.
And they were carried unto Lars: but he
Spake firmly: "Well I knew what he would claim:
The coward, knowing, comes not." Nothing more;
Nor could they guess the purpose of his mind.
In little Ulvik all the people learned
What words had passed, and there were friends of both;
But Lars kept silent, walked the ways unarmed,
And preached the pardon of an utmost wrong.
Now Thorsten saw in this but some device
To try his own forbearance: his revenge
Grew hungry for an answering enmity,
And weary of its shame; and so, at last,
He sent this message: "If Lars Thorstensen
Deny not blood he spilled, and guilt thereof,
Then let him meet me by the Graven lake,"—
On such a day.

When came the message, Lars
Spake thus to all his kindred: "I will go:
I do deny not my blood-guiltiness.
This thing hath rested on my soul for years,
And must be met." Then unto Ruth he turned:
"I go alone: abide thou with our kin."
But she arose and answered: "Nay, I go!
Forbid me not, or I must disobey,
Which were a cross. I give thee to the Lord,
His helpless instrument, to break or save;

Think not my weakness shall confuse thy will!"
Lars laid his hand upon her head, and all
Were strangely melted, though he spake no more,
Nor then, nor on the way to Graven lake.

Lo! there were many gathered, kin of both,
Or friends, or folk acquainted with the tale,
And curious for its end. The summer sky
Was beautiful above them, and the trees
Stood happy, stretching forth forgiving arms;
Yet sultry thunder in the hearts of men
Brooded, the menace of a rain of blood.
Lars paused not when he came. He saw the face
Of Thorsten, ruddy, golden-haired like Per's,
Amid the throng, and straightway went to him
And spake: "I come, as thou invitest me.
My brother, I have shed thy brother's blood;
What wouldst thou I should do thee, to atone?"

"Give yours!" cried Thorsten, stepping back a pace.

"That murderous law we took from heathen sires,"
Said Lars, "is guilt upon a Christian land.
I do abjure it. Wilt thou have my blood,
Nor less, I dare not lift a hand for thine."

"You came not, then, to fight, though branded here
A coward?"

"Nay, nor ever," answered Lars;
"But, were I coward, could I calmly bear
Thy words?" Then Thorkil, friend of Thorsten, cried:
"These people, in their garments, I have heard,
Put on their peace; or else some magic dwells
In shape of hat or color of the coat,
To make them harmless as a browsing hare.
That Lars we knew had danger in his eyes;
But this one, — why, uncover, let us see!"
Therewith struck off the hat. And others there
Fell upon Lars, and tore away his coat,
Nor ceased the outrage until they had made
His body bare to where the leathern belt
Is clasped between the breast-bone and the hip.

Around his waist they buckled then a belt,
And brought a knife, and thrust it in his hand.
The open fingers would not hold: the knife
Fell from them, struck, and quivered in the sod.
Thorsten, apart, had also bared his breast,
And waited, beautiful in rosy life.
Then Thorkil and another drew the twain
Together, hooked the belts of each, and strove
Once more to arm the passive hand of Lars:
In vain: his open fingers would not hold
The knife, which fell and quivered in the sod.
He looked in Thorsten's eyes; great sorrow fell

Upon him, and a tender human love.
"I did not this," he said; "nor will resist.
If thou art minded so, then strike me dead:
But thou art sacred, for the blood I spilled
Is in thy veins, my brother; yea, all blood
Of all men sacred is in thee." His arms
Hung at his side: he did not shrink or sway:
His flesh touched Thorsten's where the belts were joined,
And felt its warmth. Then twice did Thorsten lift
His armèd hand, and twice he let it sink:
An anguish came upon his face: he groaned,
And all that heard him marvelled at the words;
"Have pity on me; turn away thine eyes:
I cannot slay thee while they look on me!"
"If I could end this bloody custom so,
In all the land, nor plant a late remorse
For what is here thy justice," answered Lars,
"I could not say thee nay. Yet, if the deed
Be good, thou shouldst have courage for the deed!"
Once more looked Thorsten in those loving eyes,
And shrank, and shuddered, and grew deadly pale,
Till, with a gasp for breath, as one who drowns
Draws, when he dips again above the wave,
He loosed the clutching belts, and sat him down
And hid his face: they heard him only say:
"'T were well that I should die, for very shame!"
Lars heard, and spake to all: "The shame is mine,
Whose coward heart betrayed me unto guilt.
I slew my brother Per, nor sought his blood:
Thou, Thorsten, wilt not mine; I read thy heart.
But ye, who trample on the soul of man
In still demanding he shall ne'er outgrow
The savage in his veins, through faith in Good,
Who Thorsten rule, even as ye ruled myself, —
I call ye to repent! That God we left,
White Balder, were more merciful than this:
If one, henceforward, cast on Thorsten shame,
The Lord shall smite him when the judgment comes!"

Never before, such words in such a place
Were preached by such apostle. Bared, as though
For runes of death, while red Berserker rage
Kindled in some, in others smouldered out,
He raised his hand and pointed to the sky:
Far off, behind the silent fells, there rolled
A sudden thunder. Ruth, who all the while
Moved not nor spake, stood forth, and o'er her face
There came the glory of an opening heaven.
Now that she knew the habit of the folk,
She spake not; but she clothed the form of Lars
In silence, and the women, weeping, helped.
Then Thorsten rose, and seeing her, he said:
"Thou art his wife; they tell me thou art good.
I am no bloodier than thy husband was
Before he knew thee: hast thou aught to say?"
She took his hand and spake, as one inspired:

"Thou couldst not make thyself a man of blood!
This is thy seed of blessing: let it grow!
Gladness of heart, and peace, and honored name
Shall come to thee: the unrighteous, cruel law
Is broken by thy hands, no less than his
Who loves thee, and would sooner die than harm!"
"They speak the truth," said Thorsten; "thou art good,
And it were surely bitter grief to thee
If I had slain him. Go! his blood is safe
From hands of mine."

His words the most approved;
The rest, bewildered, knew not what to say.
In these the stubborn mind and plastic heart
Agreed not quickly, for the thing was strange,
An olden tale with unforeboded end:
They must have time. The crowd soon fell apart,
Some faces glad, all solemn, and dispersed;
Except one woman, who, from time to time,
Pressed forward, then, as with uncertain will,
Turned back as often. Troubled was her face
And worn: within the hollows of her eyes
Dwelt an impatient sorrow, and her lips
Had from themselves the girlish fulness pressed.
Her hair hung negligent, though plenteous still;
And beauty that no longer guards itself,
But listlessly beholds its ruin come,
Made her an apparition wild and sad,
A cloud on others' joy.

Lars, as he left
That field unsullied, saw the woman stand.
"Brita!" he cried; and all the past returned
And all the present mixed with it, and made
His mouth to quiver and his eyes to fill:
"Unhappy Brita, and I made thee so!
Is there forgiveness yet for too much love
And foolish faith, that brought us double woe?
I dare not ask it; couldst thou give unasked?"
Her face grew hard to keep the something back
Which softened her: "Make Per alive," she said,
"One moment only, that he pardon me,
And thou art pardoned! else, I think, canst thou
Bear silence, as I bear it from the dead.
Oh, thou hast done me harm!" But Ruth addressed
These words to her: "I never did thee harm,
Yet on my soul my husband's guilt to thee
Is made a shadow: let me be thy friend!
Only a woman knows a woman's need."

Lars understood the gesture and the glance
Which Ruth then gave, and hastened on the path
To join his kindred, leaving them alone.
So Ruth by Brita walked, and spake to her
In words whose very sound a comfort gave,
Like some soft wind that o'er an arid land,

Unfelt at first, fans on with cooling wings
Till all the herbage freshens, and the soil
Is moist with dew; and Brita's arid heart
Thus opened: "Yea, all this is very well.
So much thou knowest, being woman, — love
Of man, and man's of thee, and both declared:
But say, how canst thou measure misery
Of love that lost its chances, made the Past
One dumbness, and forever reckons o'er
The words unspoken, which to both were sweet,
The touch of hands that never binding met,
The kisses, never given and never took,
The hopes and raptures that were never shared, —
Nay, worse than this, for she withheld, who knew
They might have been, from him who never knew!"

Therewith her passion loosed itself in sobs,
And on the pitying breast of Ruth she wept
Her heart to calmness; then, with less of pain,
She told the simple story of her life:
How, scarce two years before, her grandam died,
Who would have seen her wedded, and was wroth,
At times, in childish petulance of age,
But kinder — 't was a blessing! — ere she died,
Leaving the cottage highest on the slope,
Naught else, to Brita; but her wants were few.
The garden helped her, and the spotted cow,
Now old, indeed: she span the winter through,
And there was meal enough, and Thorsten gave
Sometimes a fish, because she grieved for Per;
And, now the need of finery was gone, —
For men came not a-wooing where consent
Abode not, — she had made the least suffice.
Yes, she was lonely: it was better so,
For she must learn to live in loneliness.
As much as unto Ruth she had not said
To any woman, trusting her, it seemed,
Without a knowledge, more than them she knew
"Yea, trust me, Sister Brita!" Ruth replied,
"And try to love: my heart is drawn to thee."
Thereafter, many a day, went Ruth alone
To Brita's cottage, vexing not with words
That woke her grief, and silent as to Lars,
Till Brita learned to smile when she appeared,
And missed her when she came not. Now, meanwhile,
The news of Lars, and Thorsten's foiled revenge
Beside the lake of Graven, travelled far
Past Vik and Vossevangen, o'er the fells,
To all the homesteads of the Bergenstift;
And every gentle heart leaped up in joy,
While those of restless old Berserker blood
Beat hot with wrath. Who oversets old laws,
They said, is dangerous; and who is he
That dares to preach, and hath not been ordained?
This thing concerns the ministers, they whom
The State sets over us, with twofold power,

Divine and secular, to teach and rule
Them he the shepherd of the Ulvik flock.
Not now that good old man, but one whose youth
More beautiful showed his Christless bigotry.
Made Sabbaths hot with his sanctimonies
Of Lars, and stirred a tumult in the land.
Some turned away, and all grew faint of heart.
Seeing the foothold yield, and slip, till Lars
Now stopped at home and drave by messages
From Gustaf Hansen and the faithful souls
In Arendal, said: "It is time to go."

"Nay, tarry but a little while," spake Ruth.
"I have my purpose here, as thou hadst thine:
Grant me but freedom, for the end, I think,
Is justified."

Lars answered: "Have thy will!"

She summoned Brita, and the twain went down
To pace the stanty strand beside the wave,
Which, after storm, was quiet, though the gloom
Of high, opposing mountains filled the fiord.
Ruth spake of parting; Brita answered not.
But up and down in silence walked the strand.
Then suddenly: "No message sendeth Lars?
My pardon he implored: and that, to thee,
I know were welcome. Whilst thou asked, perchance,
Perverse in sorrow, I should still withhold:
But thou departest, who hast been so kind,
And I—ah, God! what else have I to give?"
"The Lord requite thee, Brita!" Ruth exclaimed:
"The gift that blesses must be given unasked:
What now remains is easy. Come with us,
With Lars and me, and be our home thy home,
All peace we win, all comfort, thine as ours."

Once more walked down up and down the strand
Bowing her face upon her shielding hands,
As if to weep unwatched; then stood, and stirred
About to speak, when, with a shrilling cry
She sprang and fell, and grovelled on her knees
And thrust her fingers in the wet sea-sand.
Ruth, all in terror, ran to her, and saw
How, from the bones of some long-wasted fish
An osprey dropped, or tempest beat to death,
Caught in the breakers, and the drifted shells,
And tangles of the rotting kelp, she plucked
Something that sparkled, pressed it to her lips,
And cried: "A sign! a sign! 't is grandam speaks!"
Then trembling rose, and flung herself on Ruth,
And kissed her, saying: "I will follow thee.
My heart assented, yet I had denied,
But, ere I spake, the miracle was done!
Thy words give back the jewel lost with Per:
Tell Lars I do forgive him, and will serve

Then, Lars, a willing bondman, to thy home
He bore with him to dwell
Those noble beasts, nearly prostrated
Of course and pulpit for a while left all
In peace and quiet alone within his bed
Of Palmetto roots. Home, but the Lord inspired
Him again with power, he set up a heavy weight
A chastened spirit and was enough good within
Him was a happy morning and she died.
And towards came on all the farm to see they
Or would not consult on his former use.
The Lord Buddha, to Lars, our poor prayer
And gave her existence and his whole house
By Lars the origin of the prayer and noon
Between a warning on Norwegian hills

Here, now they fade. The purpose of their lives
Was filled up, by something over life,
To power and service. Through the name of Lars
He never heard, the healing of the word.
In to its sacrifice waste. Each enjoyed that
Human existence, but a myriad wrapped here
Formed up the Divine and made it beautiful.

LATEST LYRICS

LATEST LYRICS

1870–1878

THE BURDEN OF THE DAY

I

Who shall rise and cast away,
First, the Burden of the Day?
Who assert his place, and teach
Lighter labor, nobler speech,
Standing firm, erect, and strong,
Proud as Freedom, free as Song?

II

Lo! we groan beneath the weight
Our own weaknesses create;
Crook the knee and shut the lip,
All for tamer fellowship;
Load our slack, compliant clay
With the Burden of the Day!

III

Higher paths there are to tread;
Fresher fields around us spread;
Other flames of sun and star
Flash at hand and lure afar;
Larger manhood might we share,
Surer fortune, — did we dare!

IV

In our mills of common thought
By the pattern all is wrought:
In our school of life, the man
Drills to suit the public plan,
And through labor, love, and play,
Shifts the Burden of the Day.

V

Aha, the gods of wood and stone
Can a single saint dethrone,
But the people who shall aid
'Gainst the puppets they have made?
First they teach and then obey:
'T is the Burden of the Day.

VI

Thunder shall we never hear
In this ordered atmosphere?
Never this monotony feel
Shattered by a trumpet's peal?
Never airs that burst and blow
From eternal summits, know?

VII

Though no man resent his wrong,
Still is free the poet's song:
Still, a stag, his thought may leap
O'er the herded swine and sheep,
And in pastures far away
Lose the Burden of the Day!

1870.

IN THE LISTS

Could I choose the age and fortunate season
When to be born,
I would fly from the censure of your barren reason,
And the scourges of your scorn:
Could I take the tongue, and the land, and the station
That to me were fit,
I would make my life a force and an exultation,
And you could not stifle it!

But the thing most near to the freedom I covet
Is the freedom I wrest
From a time that would bar me from climbing above it,
To seek the East in the West.
I have dreamed of the forms of a nobler existence
Than you give me here,
And the beauty that lies afar in the dateless distance
I would conquer, and bring more near.

It is good, undowered with the bounty of Fortune,
In the sun to stand:

Let others excuse, and cringe, and importune,
I will try the strength of my hand!
If I fail, I shall fall not among the mistaken,
Whom you dare deride:
If I win, you shall hear, and see, and at last awaken
To thank me because I defied!

1871.

THE SUNSHINE OF THE GODS

I

Who shall sunder the fetters,
Who scale the invisible ramparts
Whereon our nimblest forces
Hurl their vigor in vain?
Where, like the baffling crystal
To a wildered bird of the heavens,
Something holds and imprisons
The eager, the stirring brain?

II

Alas, from the fresh emotion,
From thought that is born of feeling,
From form, self-shaped, and slowly
Its own completeness evolving,
To the rhythmic speech, how long!
What hand shall master the tumult
Where one on the other tramples,
And none escapes a wrong?
Where the crowding germs of a thousand
Fancies encumber the portal,
Till one plucks a voice from the murmurs
And lifts himself into Song!

III

As a man that walks in the mist,
As one that gropes for the morning
Through lengthening chambers of twilight,
The souls of the poems wander
Restless, and dumb, and lost,
Till the Word, like a beam of morning,
Shivers the pregnant silence,
And the light of speech descends
Like a tongue of the Pentecost!

IV

Ah, moment not to be purchased,
Not to be won by prayers,
Not by toil to be conquered,
But given, lest one despair,
By the Gods in wayward kindness,
Stay — thou art all too fair!
Hour of the dancing measures,
Sylph of the dew and rainbow,
Let us clutch thy shining hair!

V

For the mist is blown from the mind,
For the impotent yearning is over,
And the wings of the thoughts have power:
In the warmth and the glow creative
Existence mellows and ripens,
And a crowd of swift surprises
Sweetens the fortunate hour;
Till a shudder of rapture loosens
The tears that hang on the eyelids
Like a breeze-suspended shower,
With a sense of heavenly freshness
Blown from beyond the sunshine,
And the blood, like the sap of the roses,
Breaks into bud and flower.

VI

'T is the Sunshine of the Gods,
The sudden light that quickens,
Unites the nimble forces,
And yokes the shy expression
To the thoughts that waited long, —
Waiting and wooing vainly:
But now they meet like lovers
In the time of willing increase,
Each warming each, and giving
The kiss that maketh strong:
And the mind feels fairest May-time
In the marriage of its passions,
For Thought is one with Speech,
In the Sunshine of the Gods,
And Speech is one with Song!

VII

Then a rhythmic pulse makes order
In the troops of wandering fancies:
Held in soft subordination,
Lo! they follow, lead, or fly.
The fields of their feet are endless,
And the heights and the deeps are open
To the glance of the equal sky:
And the Masters sit no longer
In inaccessible distance,
But give to the haughtiest question,
Smiling, a sweet reply.

VIII

ost mourn, because the moment
a gift beyond thy will, —
gift thy dreams had promised,
et they gave to Chance its keeping
nd fettered thy free achievement
ith the hopes they not fulfil?
ost sigh o'er the fleeting rapture,
he bliss of reconcilement
f powers that work apart,
et lean on each other still?

IX

e glad, for this is the token,
he sign and the seal of the Poet:
ere it held by will or endeavor,
here were naught so precious in Song.
ait: for the shadows unlifted
o a million that crave the sunshine,
nall be lifted for thee erelong.
ight from the loftier regions
ere unattainable ever, —
ath of brightness and beauty, —
et it make thee glad and strong!
ot to clamor or fury,
ot to lament or yearning,
ut to faith and patience cometh
he Sunshine of the Gods,
he hour of perfect Song!

NOTUS IGNOTO

I

o you sigh for the power you dream of,
he fair, evasive secret,
he rare imagined passion,
Friend unknown!
o you haunt Egyptian portals,
here, within, the laboring goddess
ields to the hands of her chosen
he sacred child, alone?

II

h pause! There is consolation
or you, and pride:
ee of choice and worship,
pared the pang and effort,
or partial made by triumph,
he poet's limitations
ou lightly set aside:
evived, in your fresher spirit
he buds of my thought may blossom,
nd the clew, from weary fingers
allen, become your guide!

The taker, even as the giver,
The user as the maker,
Soil as seed, and rain as sunshine,
Alike are glorified!

III

Loss with gain is balanced;
You may reach, when I but beckon;
You may drink, though mine the vintage,
You complete what I begun.
When at the temple-door I falter,
You advance to the altar;
I but rise to the daybreak,
You to the sun!
My goal is your beginning:
My steeps of aspiration
For you are won!

IV

Hark! the nightingale is chanting
As if her mate but knew;
Yet the dream within me
Which the bird-voice wakens,
Takes from her unconscious
Prompting, form and hue:
So the song I sing you,
Voice alone of my being,
Song for the mate and the nestling.
Finer and sweeter meaning
May possess for you!
Lifting to starry summits,
Filling with infinite passion,
While the witless singer broodeth
In the darkness and the dew!

V

Carved on the rock as an arrow
To point your path, am I:
A cloud that tells, in the heavens,
Which way the breezes fly:
A brook that is born in the meadows,
And wanders at will, nor guesses
Whither its waters hie:
A child that scatters blossoms,
Thoughtless of memoried odors,
Or sweet surprises of color,
That waken when you go by:
A bee-bird of the woodland,
That finds the honeyed hollows
Of ancient oaks, for others, —
Even as these, am I!

VI

Accept, and enjoy, and follow, —
Conquer wherein I yield!

Make yours the bright conclusion,
From me concealed!
Truth, to whom will possess it,
Beauty to whom embraces,
Song and its inmost secret,
Life and its unheard music,
To whom will hear and know them,
Are ever revealed!

THE TWO HOMES

I

My home was seated high and fair,
Upon a mountain's side;
The day was longest, brightest there;
Beneath, the world was wide.
Across its blue, embracing zone
The rivers gleamed, the cities shone,
And over the edge of the fading rim
I saw the storms in the distance dim,
And the flash of the soundless thunder.

II

But weary grew the sharp, cold wine
Of winds that never kissed,
The changeless green of fir and pine,
The gray and clinging mist.
Above the granite sprang no bowers;
The soil gave low and scentless flowers;
And the drone and din of the waterfall
Became a challenge, a taunting call:
"'T is fair, 't is fair in the valley!"

III

Of all the homesteads deep and far
My fancy clung to one,
Whose gable burned, a mellow star,
Touched by the sinking sun.
Unseen around, but not unguessed,
The orchards made a leafy nest;
The turf before it was thick, I knew,
And bees were busy the garden through,
And the windows were dark with roses.

IV

"'T is happier there, below," I sighed:
The world is warm and near,
And closer love and comfort hide,
That cannot reach me here.
Who there abides must be so blest
He 'll share with me his sheltered nest,
If down to the valley I should go,
Leaving the granite, the pines and snow,
And the winds that are keen as lances."

V

I wandered down, by ridge and dell;
The way was rough and long:
Though earlier shadows round me fell,
I cheered them with my song.
The world's great circle narrower grew,
Till hedge and thicket hid the blue;
But over the orchards, near at hand,
The gable shone on the quiet land,
And far away was the mountain!

VI

Then came the master: mournful-eyed
And stern of brow was he.
"Oh, planted in such peace!" I cried,
"Spare but the least to me!"
"Who seeks," he said, "this brooding haze,
The tameness of these weary days?
The highway's dust, the glimmer and heat,
The woods that fetter the young wind's feet,
And hide the world and its beauty?"

VII

He stretched his hand; he looked afar
With eyes of old desire:
I saw my home, a mellow star
That held the sunset's fire.
"But yonder home," he cried, "how fair!
Its chambers burn like gilded air;
I know that the gardens are wild as dreams,
With the sweep of winds, the dash of streams,
And the pines that sound as an anthem!

VIII

"So quiet, so serenely high
It sits, when clouds are furled,
And knows the beauty of the sky,
The glory of the world!

Who there abides must be so blest
He 'll share with me that lofty crest,
If up to the mountain I should go,
Leaving the dust and the glare below,
And the weary life of the valley!"

1873.

IRIS

I

I AM born from the womb of the cloud
And the strength of the ardent sun,
When the winds have ceased to be loud,
And the rivers of rain to run.
Then light, on my sevenfold arch,
I swing in the silence of air,
While the vapors beneath me march
And leave the sweet earth bare.

II

For a moment, I hover and gleam
On the skirts of the sinking storm;
And I die in the bliss of the beam
That gave me being and form.
I fade, as in human hearts
The rapture that mocks the will:
I pass, as a dream departs
That cannot itself fulfil!

III

Beyond the bridge I have spanned
The fields of the Poet unfold,
And the riches of Fairyland
At my bases of misty gold.
I keep the wealth of the spheres
Which the high Gods never have won;
And I coin, from their airy tears,
The diadem of the sun!

IV

For some have stolen the grace
That is hidden in rest or strife;
And some have copied the face
Or echoed the voice of Life;
And some have woven of sound
A chain of the sweetest control,
And some have fabled or found
The key to the human soul:

V

But I, from the blank of the air
And the white of the barren beam,
Have wrought the colors that flare
In the forms of a painter's dream.
I gather the souls of the flowers,
And the sparks of the gems, to me;
Till pale are the blossoming bowers,
And dim the chameleon sea!

VI

By the soul's bright sun, the eye,
I am thrown on the artist's brain;
He follows me, and I fly;
He pauses, I stand again.
O'er the reach of the painted world
My chorded colors I hold,
On a canvas of cloud impearled
Drawn with a brush of gold!

VII

If I lure, as a mocking sprite,
I give, as a goddess bestows,
The red, with its soul of might,
And the blue, with its cool repose;
The yellow that beckons and beams,
And the gentler children they bear:
For the portal of Art's high dreams
Is builded of Light and Air!

1872.

IMPLORA PACE

THE clouds that stoop from yonder sky
Discharge their burdens, and are free;
The streams that take them hasten by,
To find relief in lake and sea.

The wildest wind in vales afar
Sleeps, pillowed on its ruffled wings;
And song, through many a stormy bar,
Beats into silence on the strings!

And love o'ercomes his young unrest,
And first ambition's flight is o'er;
And doubt is cradled on the breast
Of perfect faith, and speaks no more.

Our dreams and passions cease to dare,
And homely patience learns the part;
Yet still some keen, pursuing care
Forbids consent to brain and heart.

The gift unreached, beyond the hand;
The fault in all of beauty won;
The mildew of the harvest land,
The spots upon the risen sun!

And still some cheaper service claims
The will that leaps to loftier call:
Some cloud is cast on splendid aims,
On power achieved some common thrall.

To spoil each beckoning victory,
A thousand pygmy hands are thrust;
And, round each height attained, we see
Our ether dim with lower dust.

Ah, could we breathe some peaceful air
And all save purpose there forget,
Till eager courage learn to bear
The gadfly's sting, the pebble's fret!

Let higher goal and harsher way,
To test our virtue, then combine!
'T is not for idle ease we pray,
But freedom for our task divine.

1872.

PENN CALVIN

I

Search high and low, search up and down,
By light of stars or sun,
And of all the good folks of our town
There's like Penn Calvin none.
He lightly laughs when all condemn,
He smiles when others pray;
And what is sorest truth to them
To him is idle play.

II

"Penn Calvin, lift, as duty bids,
The load we all must bear!"
He only lifts his languid lids,
And says: "The morn is fair!"
"Learn while you may! for Life is stern,
And Art, alas! is long."
He hums and answers: "Yes, I learn
The cadence of a song."

III

"The world is dark with human woe;
Man eats of bitter food."
"The world," he says, "is all aglow
With beauty, bliss, and good!"
"To crush the senses you must strive,
The beast of flesh destroy!"
"God gave this body, all alive,
And every sense is joy!"

IV

"Nay, these be heathen words we hear;
The faith they teach is flown, —
A mist that clings to temples drear
And altars overthrown."
"I reck not how nor whence it came,"
He answers; "I possess:
If heathens felt and owned the same,
How bright was heathenesse!"

V

"Though you be stubborn to believe,
Yet learn to grasp and hold:
There's power and honor to achieve,
And royal rule of gold!"
Penn Calvin plucked an open rose
And carolled to the sky:
"Shine, sun of Day, until its close, —
They live, and so do I!"

VI

His eyes are clear as they were kissed
By some unrisen dawn;
Our grave and stern philanthropist
Looks sad, and passes on.
Our pastor scowls, the pious flock
Avert their heads, and flee;
For pestilence or earthquake shock
Less dreadful seems than he.

VII

But all the children round him cling,
Depraved as they were born;
And vicious men his praises sing,
Whom he forgets to scorn.
Penn Calvin's strange indifference gives
Our folks a grievous care:
He's simply glad because he lives,
And glad the world is fair!

1871.

SUMMER NIGHT

VARIATIONS ON CERTAIN MELODIES

I

ANDANTE

Under the full-blown linden and the plane,
That link their arms above
In mute, mysterious love,
I hear the strain!
Is it the far postilion's horn,
Mellowed by starlight, floating up the valley,
Or song of love-sick peasant, borne
Across the fields of fragrant corn,
And poplar-guarded alley?
Now from the woodbine and the unseen rose
What new delight is showered?
The warm wings of the air
Drop into downy indolence and close,
So sweetly overpowered:
But nothing sleeps, though rest seems everywhere.

II

ADAGIO

Something came with the falling dusk,
Came, and quickened to soft unrest:
Something floats in the linden's musk,
And throbs in the brook on the meadow's breast.
Shy Spirit of Love, awake, awake!
All things feel thee,
And all reveal thee:
The night was given for thy sweet sake.
Toil slinks aside, and leaves to thee the land;
The heart beats warmer for the idle hand;
The timid tongue unlearns its wrong,
And speech is turned to song;
The shaded eyes are braver;
And every life, like flowers whose scent is dumb
Till dew and darkness come,
Gives forth a tender savor.
O, each so lost in all, who may resist
The plea of lips unkissed,
Or, hearing such a strain,
Though kissed a thousand times, kiss not again!

III

APPASSIONATO

Was it a distant flute
That breathed, and now is mute?
Or that lost soul men call the nightingale,
In bosky coverts hidden,
Filling with sudden passion all the vale?
O, chant again the tale,
And call on her whose name returns, unbidden,
A longing and a dream,
Adelaïda!
For while the sprinkled stars
Sparkle, and wink, and gleam,
Adelaïda!
Darkness and perfume cleave the unknown bars
Between the enamored heart and thee,
And thou and I are free,
Adelaïda!
Less than a name, a melody, art thou,
A hope, a haunting vow!
The passion-cloven
Spirit of thy Beethoven
Claimed with less ardor than I claim thee now,
Adelaïda!
Take form, at last: from these o'erbending branches
Descend, or from the grass arise!
I scarce shall see thine eyes,
Or know what blush the shadow stanches;
But all my being's empty urn shall be
Filled with thy mystery!

IV

CAPRICCIOSO

Nay, nay! the longings tender,
The fear, the marvel, and the mystery,

The shy, delicious dread, the unreserved surrender,
Give, if thou canst, to me!
For I would be,
In this expressive languor,
While night conceals, the wooed and not the wooer;
Shaken with supplication, keen as anger;
Pursued, and thou pursuer!
Plunder my bosom of its hoarded fire,
And so assail me,
That coy denial fail me,
Slain by the mirrored shape of my desire!
Though life seem overladen
With conquered bliss, it only craves the more:
Teach me the other half of passion's lore —
Be thou the man, and I the maiden!
Ah! come,
While earth is waiting, heaven is dumb,
And blossom-sighs
So penetrate the indolent air,
The very stars grow fragrant in the skies!
Arise,
And thine approach shall make me fair,
Thy borrowed pleading all too soon subdue me,
Till both forget the part;
And she who failed to woo me
So caught, is held to my impatient heart!

1873.

THE GUESTS OF NIGHT

I RIDE in a gloomy land,
I travel a ghostly shore, —
Shadows on either hand,
Darkness behind and before;
Veils of the summer night
Dusking the woods I know;
A whisper haunts the height,
And the rivulet croons below.

A waft from the roadside bank
Tells where the wild-rose nods;
The hollows are heavy and dank
With the steam of the golden-rods:
Incense of Night and Death,
Odors of Life and Day,
Meet and mix in a breath,
Drug me, and lapse away.

Is it the hand of the Past,
Stretched from its open tomb,
Or a spell from thy glamoury cast,
O mellow and mystic gloom?
All, wherein I have part,
All that was loss or gain,
Slips from the clasping heart,
Breaks from the grasping brain.

Lo, what is left? I am bare
As a new-born soul, — I am naught;
My deeds are as dust in air,
My words are as ghosts of thought.
I ride through the night alone,
Detached from the life that seemed,
And the best I have felt or known
Is less than the least I dreamed.

But the Night, like Agrippa's glass,
Now, as I question it, clears;
Over its vacancy pass
The shapes of the crowded years;
Meanest and most august,
Hated or loved, I see
The dead that have long been dust,
The living, so dead to me!

Place in the world's applause?
Nay, there is nothing there!
Strength from unyielding laws?
A gleam, and the glass is bare.
The lines of a life in song?
Faint runes on the rocks of time?
I see but a formless throng
Of shadows that fall or climb.

What else? Am I then despoiled
Of the garments I wove and wore?
Have I so refrained and toiled,
To find there is naught in store?
I have loved, — I love! Behold,
How the steady pictures rise!
And the shadows are pierced with gold
From the stars of immortal eyes.

Nearest or most remote,
But dearest, hath none delayed;
And the spirits of kisses float
O'er the lips that never fade.

The Night each guest denies
Of the hand or haughty brain,
But the loves that were, arise,
And the loves that are, remain.

1871.

SONNET

Who, harnessed in his mail of Self, demands
To be men's master and their sovran guide? —
Proclaims his place, and by sole right of pride
A candidate for love and reverence stands,
As if the power within his empty hands
Had fallen from the sky, with all beside,
So oft to longing and to toil denied,
That makes the leaders and the lords of lands?
He who would lead must first himself be led;
Who would be loved be capable of love
Beyond the utmost he receives; who claims
The rod of power must first have bowed his head,
And, being honored, honor what 's above:
This know the men who leave the world their names.

1872.

TO MARIE

WITH A COPY OF THE TRANSLATION OF FAUST

This plant, it may be, grew from vigorous seed,
Within the field of study set by Song;
Sent from its sprouting germ, perchance, a throng
Of roots even to that depth where passions breed;
Chose its own time, and of its place took heed;
Sucked fittest nutriment to make it strong: —
But you from every wayward season's wrong
Did guard it, showering, at its changing need,
Or dew of sympathy, or summer glow
Of apprehension of the finer toil,
And gave it, so, the nature that endures.
Our secret this, the world can never know:
You were the breeze and sunshine, I the soil:
The form is mine, color and odor yours!

1875.

CENTENNIAL HYMN

O God of Peace! now o'er the world
The armies rest, with banners furled:
O God of Toil! beneath thy sight
The toiling nations here unite;
O God of Beauty, bend and see
The Beautiful that shadows thee!

Our land, young hostess of the West,
Now first in festal raiment dressed,
Invites from every realm and clime
Her sisters of the elder time,
And bare of shield, ungirt by sword,
Bids welcome to her bounteous board.

Thy will, dear Father, gave to each
The force of hand, the fire of speech;
Thy guidance led from low to high,
Made failure still in triumph die,
And set for all, in fields apart,
The oak of Toil, the rose of Art!

What though, within thy plan sublime,
Our eras are the dust of time,
Yet unto later good ordain
This rivalry of heart and brain,
And bless, through power and wisdom won,
The peaceful cycle here begun!

Let each with each his bounty spend,
Now knowledge borrow, beauty lend!
Let each in each more nobly see
Thyself in him, his faith in Thee:
All conquering power Thy gift divine,
All glory but the seal of Thine!

February, 1876.

THE SONG OF 1876

I

WAKEN, voice of the Land's Devotion!
Spirit of freedom, awaken all!
Ring, ye shores, to the Song of Ocean,
Rivers, answer, and mountains, call!
The golden day has come:
Let every tongue be dumb,
That sounded its malice or murmured its fears;
She hath won her story;
She wears her glory;
We crown her the Land of a Hundred Years!

II

Out of darkness and toil and danger
Into the light of Victory's day,
Help to the weak, and home to the stranger,
Freedom to all, she hath held her way!
Now Europe's orphans rest
Upon her mother-breast:
The voices of Nations are heard in the cheers;
That shall cast upon her
New love and honor,
And crown her the Queen of a Hundred Years!

III

North and South, we are met as brothers:
East and West, we are wedded as one!
Right of each shall secure our mother's;
Child of each is her faithful son!
We give Thee heart and hand,
Our glorious native Land,
For battle has tried thee, and time endears:
We will write thy story,
And keep thy glory,
As pure as of old for a Thousand Years!

1876.

IMPROVISATIONS

I

THROUGH the lonely halls of the night
My fancies fly to thee:
Through the lonely halls of the night,
Alone, I cry to thee.
For the stars bring presages
Of love, and of love's delight:
Let them bear my messages
Through the lonely halls of the night!

In the golden porch of the morn
Thou com'st anew to me:
In the golden porch of the morn,
Say, art thou true to me?
If dreams have shaken thee
With the call thou canst not scorn,
Let Love awaken thee
In the golden porch of the morn!

II

The rose of your cheek is precious;
Your eyes are warmer than wine;
You catch men's souls in the meshes
Of curls that ripple and shine—
But, ah! not mine.

Your lips are a sweet persuasion;
Your bosom a sleeping sea;
Your voice, with its fond evasion,
Is a call and a charm to me;
But I am free!

As the white moon lifts the waters,
You lift the passions, and lead;
As a chieftainess proud with slaughters,
You smile on the hearts that bleed:
But I take heed!

III

Come to me, Lalage!
Girl of the flying feet,
Girl of the tossing hair
And the red mouth, small and sweet;
Less of the earth than air,
So witchingly fond and fair,
Lalage!

Touch me, Lalage!
Girl of the soft white hand,
Girl of the low white brow
And the roseate bosom band;
Bloom from an orchard bough
Less downy-soft than thou,
Lalage!

Kiss me, Lalage!
Girl of the fragrant breath,

Girl of the sun of May;
As a bird that flutters in death,
My fluttering pulses say:
If thou be Death, yet stay,
Lalage!

IV

What if I couch in the grass, or listlessly rock on the waters?
If in the market I stroll, sit by the beakers of wine?
Witched by the fold of a cloud, the flush of a meadow in blossom,
Soothed by the amorous airs, touched by the lips of the dew?
First must be color and odor, the simple, unmingled sensation,
Then, at the end of the year, apples and honey and grain.
You, reversing the order, your barren and withering branches
Vainly will shake in the winds, mine hanging heavy with gold!

V

Though thy constant love I share,
Yet its gift is rarer;
In my youth I thought thee fair;
Thou art older and fairer!

Full of more than young delight
Now day and night are;
For the presence, then so bright,
Is closer, brighter.

In the haste of youth we miss
Its best of blisses:
Sweeter than the stolen kiss,
Are the granted kisses.

Dearer than the words that hide
The love abiding,
Are the words that fondly chide,
When love needs chiding.

Higher than the perfect song
For which love longeth,
Is the tender fear of wrong,
That never wrongeth.

She whom youth alone makes dear
May awhile seem nearer:
Thou art mine so many a year,
The older, the dearer!

VI

A grass-blade is my warlike lance,
A rose-leaf is my shield;
Beams of the sun are, every one
My chargers for the field.

The morning gives me golden steeds,
The moon gives silver-white;
The stars drop down, my helm to crown,
When I go forth to fight.

Against me ride in iron mail
The squadrons of the foe:
The bucklers flash, the maces crash,
The haughty trumpets blow.

One touch, and all, with armor cleft,
Before me turn and yield.
Straight on I ride: the world is wide;
A rose-leaf is my shield!

Then dances o'er the waterfall
The rainbow, in its glee;
The daisy sings, the lily rings
Her bells of victory.

So am I armed where'er I go,
And mounted night or day:
Who shall oppose the conquering rose,
And who the sunbeam slay?

VII

The star o' the morn is whitest,
The bosom of dawn is brightest;
The dew is sown,
And the blossom blown
Wherein thou, my Dear, delightest.

Hark, I have risen before thee,
That the spell of the day be o'er thee;
That the flush of my love
May fall from above,
And, mixed with the moon, adore thee!

Dark dreams must now forsake thee,
And the bliss of thy being take thee!
Let the beauty of morn
In thine eyes be born,
And the thought of me awake thee!

Come forth to hear thy praises,
Which the wakening world upraises;
Let thy hair be spun
With the gold o' the sun,
And thy feet be kissed by the daisies!

VIII

Near in the forest
I know a glade;
Under the tree-tops
A secret shade!

Vines are the curtains,
Blossoms the floor;
Voices of waters
Sing evermore.

There, when the sunset's
Lances of gold
Pierce, or the moonlight
Is silvery cold,

Would that an angel
Led thee to me—
So, out of loneliness
Love should be!

Never the breezes
Should lisp what we say,
Never the waters
Our secret betray!

Silence and shadow,
After, might reign;
But the old life be ours
Never again!

IX

What if we lose the seasons
That seem of our happiest choice,
That Life is fuller of reasons
To sorrow than rejoice,
That Time is richer in treasons,
And Hope has a faltering voice?

The dreams wherewith we were dowered
Were gifts of an ignorant brain;
The truth has at last overpowered
The visions we clung to in vain:
But who would resist, as a coward,
The knowledge that cometh from pain?

For the love, as a flower of the meadow,
The love that stands firm as a tree—
For the stars that have vanished in shadow,
The daylight, enduring and free—
For a dream of the dim El Dorado,
A world to inhabit have we!

X

Heart, in my bosom beating
Fierce, as a power at bay!
Ever thy rote repeating
Louder, and then retreating,
Who shall thy being sway?

Over my will and under,
Equally king and slave,
Sometimes I hear thee thunder,
Sometimes falter and blunder
Close to the waiting grave!

Oft, in the beautiful season,
Restless thou art, and wild;
Oft, with never a reason,
Turnest and doest me treason,
Treating the man as a child!

Cold, when passion is burning,
Quick, when I sigh for rest,
Kindler of perished yearning,
Curb and government spurning,
Thou art lord of the breast!

XI

Fill, for we drink to Labor!
And Labor, you know, is Prayer:
I'll be as grand as my neighbor
Abroad, and at home as bare!
Debt, and bother, and hurry!
Others are burdened so:
Here's to the goddess Worry,
And here's to the goddess Show!

Reckless of what comes after,
Silent of whence we come:
Splendor and feast and laughter
Make the questioners dumb.
Debt, and bother, and hurry!
Nobody needs to know:
Here's to the goddess Worry,
And here's to the goddess Show!

Fame is what you have taken,
Character's what you give:
When to this truth you waken,
Then you begin to live!
Debt, and bother, and hurry
Others have risen so:
Here's to the goddess Worry,
And here's to the goddess Show!

Honor 's a thing for derision,
Knowledge a thing reviled ;
Love is a vanishing vision,
Faith is the toy of a child !
Debt, and bother, and hurry !
Honesty 's old and slow.
Here 's to the goddess Worry,
And here 's to the goddess Show !

1872–1875.

MARIGOLD

Homely, forgotten flower,
Under the rose's bower,
Plain as a weed,
Thou, the half-summer long,
Waitest and waxest strong,
Even as waits a song
Till men shall heed.

Then, when the lilies die,
And the carnations lie
In spicy death,
Over thy bushy sprays
Burst with a sudden blaze
Stars of the August days,
With Autumn's breath.

Fain would the calyx hold;
But splits, and half the gold
Spills lavishly :
Frost, that the rose appalls,
Wastes not thy coronals,
Till Summer's lustre falls
And fades in thee.

1876.

WILL AND LAW

Will, in his lawless mirth,
Cried : "Mine be the sphere of Earth!
Mine be the hills and seas,
Night calm and morning breeze,
Shadowed and sun-lit hours,
Passions, delights, and powers,
Each in its turn to choose,
All to reject or use —
Thus myself to fulfil,
For I am Will ! "

Nature, with myriad mouth,
Answered from North and South:
"Back to the nest again,
Dream of thy idle brain !
Eyes shall open, and see
Power attained through me :
Mine the increasing days,
Mine the delight that stays,
Service from each to draw —
For I am Law ! "

1876.

TRUE LOVE'S TIME OF DAY

When shall I find you, sweetheart,
That shall be and must be mine ?
I seek, though the world divides us,
And I send you the secret sign.

There 's blood in the veins of morning,
So fresh it may well deceive,
When man goes forth as Adam,
And woman awaits him as Eve.

There 's an elvish spell in twilight
When the bats of Fancy fly,
And sense is bound by a question,
And Fate by the quick reply.

And the moon is an old enchantress,
With her snares of glimmer and shade,
That have ever been false and fatal
To the dreams of man and maid.

But I 'll meet you at noonday, sweetheart,
In the billowy fields of grain,
When the sun is hot for harvest,
And the roses athirst for rain.

With the daylight's truth on your forehead,
And the daylight's love in your eye,
I 'll kiss you without a question,
And you 'll kiss me without reply.

1877.

YOUTH

Child with the butterfly,
Boy with the ball,
Youth with the maiden —
Still I am all.

Wisdom of manhood
Keeps the old joy;
Conquered illusions
Leave me a boy.

Falsehood and baseness
Teach me but this:
Earth still is beautiful,
Being is bliss.

Locks to my temples
Hoary may cling;
'T is but as daisies
On meadows of spring.

1876.

THE IMP OF SPRINGTIME

Over the eaves where the sunbeams fall
Twitters the swallow;
I hear from the mountains the cataract call:
Follow, oh, follow!

Buds on the bushes and blooms on the mead
Swiftly are swelling;
Hark! the Spring whispereth: "Make ye with speed
Ready my dwelling."

Out of the tremulous blue of the air
Calling before her,
Who was it bade me "Awake and prepare,
Thou mine adorer!"

"Leave me," I said; "I have known thee of old,
Love the annoyer,
Arming, at last, with thine arrows of gold,
Time, the Destroyer."

"Follow," he laughed, "where the bliss of the earth
Wooes thee, compelling;
Yet in the Spring, and her thousandfold birth,
I, too, am dwelling."

Out of the buds he was peeping, and sang
Soft with the swallow;
Yea, and he called where the cataract sprang:
Follow, oh, follow!
Vain to defy, or evade, or, in sooth,
Bid him to leave me!
But his deception is dearer than truth:
Let him deceive me!

1878.

A LOVER'S TEST

I sat to-day beneath the pine
And saw the long lake shine.
The wind was weary, and the day
Sank languidly away
Behind the forest's purple rim:
The sun was fair for me, I lived for him!

I did not miss you. All was sweet,
Sky, earth, and soul complete
In harmony, which could afford
No more, nor spoil the chord.
Could I be blest, and you afar,
Were other I, or you, than what we are?

The sifted silver of the night
Rained down a strange delight;
The moon's moist beams on meadows made
Pale bars athwart the shade,
And murmurs crept from tree to tree,
Mysterious whispers — not from you to me!

I stirred the embers, roused the brand
And mused: on either hand
The pedigree of human thought
Sang, censured, cheered, or taught.
Pausing at each Titanic line,
I caught no echo of your soul to mine!

At last, when life recast its form
To passive rest and warm,
Ere the soft, lingering senses cease
In sleep's half-conscious peace,
The wish I might have fashioned died
In dreams that never brought you to my side!

Farewell! my nature's highest stress
Mine equal shall possess.

'T is easier to renounce, or wait,
Haply, the perfect fate.
My coldness is the haughty fire
That naught consumes except its full desire!

1874.

TO MY DAUGHTER

LEARN to live, and live to learn,
Ignorance like a fire doth burn,
Little tasks make large return.

In thy labors patient be,
Afterward, released and free,
Nature will be bright to thee.

Toil, when willing, groweth less;
"Always play" may seem to bless,
Yet the end is weariness.

Live to learn, and learn to live,
Only this content can give;
Reckless joys are fugitive!

1872.

A FRIEND'S GREETING

TO J. G. WHITTIER, FOR HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY

SNOW-BOUND for earth, but summer-souled for thee,
Thy natal morning shines:
Hail, Friend and Poet. Give thy hand to me,
And let me read its lines!

For skilled in Fancy's palmistry am I,
When years have set their crown;
When Life gives light to read its secrets by,
And deed explains renown.

So, looking backward from thy seventieth year
On service grand and free,
The pictures of thy spirit's Past are clear,
And each interprets thee.

I see thee, first, on hills our Aryan sires
In Time's lost morning knew,
Kindling, as priest, the lonely altar-fires
That from Earth's darkness grew.

Then, wise with secrets of Chaldæan lore,
In high Akkadian fane;
Or pacing slow by Egypt's river-shore,
In Thothmes' glorious reign.

I hear thee, wroth with all iniquities
That Judah's kings betrayed,
Preach from Ain-Jidi's rock thy God's decrees,
Or Mamre's terebinth shade.

And, ah! — most piteous vision of the Past,
Drawn by thy being's law,
I see thee, martyr, in the arena cast,
Beneath the lion's paw.

Yet, afterwards, how rang thy sword upon
The Paynim helm and shield!
How shone with Godfrey, and at Askalon,
Thy white plume o'er the field!

Strange contradiction! — where the sand-waves spread
The boundless desert sea,
The Bedouin spearmen found their destined head,
Their dark-eyed chief — in thee!

And thou wert friar in Cluny's saintly cell,
And Skald by Norway's foam,
Ere fate of Poet fixed thy soul, to dwell
In this New England home.

Here art thou Poet, — more than warrior, priest;
And here thy quiet years
Yield more to us than sacrifice or feast,
Or clash of swords or spears.

The faith that lifts, the courage that sustains,
These thou wert sent to teach:
Hot blood of battle, beating in thy veins,
Is turned to gentle speech.

Not less, but more, than others hast thou striven;
Thy victories remain:
The scars of ancient hate, long since forgiven,
Have lost their power to pain.

Apostle pure of Freedom and of Right,
Thou had'st thy one reward:
Thy prayers were heard, and flashed upon thy sight
The Coming of the Lord!

Now, sheathed in myrtle of thy tender songs,
Slumbers the blade of truth;
But Age's wisdom, crowning thee, prolongs
The eager hope of Youth!

Another line upon thy hand I trace,
All destinies above:
Men know thee most as one that loves his race,
And bless thee with their love!

1877.

PEACH-BLOSSOM

I

Nightly the hoar-frost freezes
The young grass of the field,
Nor yet have blander breezes
The buds of the oak unsealed:
Not yet pours out the pine
His airy resinous wine;
But over the southern slope,
In the heat and hurry of hope,
The wands of the peach-tree first
Into rosy beauty burst:
A breath, and the sweet buds ope!
A day, and the orchards bare,
Like maids in haste to be fair,
Lightly themselves adorn
With a scarf the Spring at the door
Has sportively flung before,
Or a stranded cloud of the morn!

II

What spirit of Persia cometh
And saith to the buds, "Unclose!"
Ere ever the first bee hummeth,
Or woodland wild flower blows?
What prescient soul in the sod
Garlands each barren rod
With fringes of bloom that speak
Of the baby's tender breast,
And the boy's pure lip unpressed,
And the pink of the maiden's cheek?
The swift, keen Orient so
Prophesies as of old,
While the apple's blood is cold,
Remembering the snow.

III

Afar, through the mellow hazes
Where the dreams of June are stayed,
The hills, in their vanishing mazes,
Carry the flush, and fade!
Southward they fall, and reach
To the bay and the ocean beach,
Where the soft, half-Syrian air
Blows from the Chesapeake's
Inlets and coves and creeks
On the fields of Delaware!
And the rosy lakes of flowers,
That here alone are ours,
Spread into seas that pour
Billow and spray of pink
Even to the blue wave's brink,
All down the Eastern Shore!

IV

Pain, Doubt, and Death are over!
Who thinks, to-day, of toil?
The fields are certain of clover,
The gardens of wine and oil.
What though the sap of the North
Drowsily peereth forth
In the orchards, and still delays?
The peach and the poet know
Under the chill the glow,
And the token of golden days!

V

What fool, to-day, would rather
In wintry memories dwell?
What miser reach to gather
The fruit these boughs foretell?
No, no! — the heart has room
For present joy alone,
Light shed and sweetness blown,
For odor and color and bloom!
As the earth in the shining sky,
Our lives in their own bliss lie;
Whatever is taught or told,
However men moan and sigh,
Love never shall grow cold,
And Life shall never die!

1876.

ASSYRIAN NIGHT-SONG

I

THERE is naught, on either hand,
But the moon upon the sand.
Pale and glimmering, far and dim,
To the Desert's utmost rim,
Flows the inundating light
Over all the lands of Night.
Bel, the burning lord, has fled:
In her blue, uncurtained bed,
Ishtar, bending from above,
Seeks her Babylonian love.
Silver-browed, forever fair,
Goddess of the dusky hair
And the jewel-sprinkled breast,
Give me love, or give me rest!

II

I have wandered lone and far
As the ship of Izdubar,
When the gathered waters rose
High on Nizir's mountain snows,
Drifting where the torrent sped
Over life and glory dead.
Hear me now! I stretch my hands
From the moon-sea of the sands
Unto thee, or any star
That was guide to Izdubar!
Where the bulls with kingly heads
Guard the way to palace-beds,
Once I saw a woman go,
Swift as air and soft as snow,
Making swan and cypress one,
Steel and honey, night and sun, —
Once of death I knew the sting:
Beauty queen — and I not king!

III

Where the Hanging Gardens soar
Over the Euphrates' shore,
And from palm and clinging vine
Lift aloft the Median pine,
Torches flame and wine is poured,
And the child of Bel is lord!
I am here alone with thee,
Ishtar, daughter of the Sea,
Who of woven dew and air
Spread'st an ocean, phantom-fair,
With a slow pulse beating through
Wave of air and foam of dew.
As I stand, I seem to drift
With its noiseless fall and lift,
While a veil of lightest lawn,
Or a floating form withdrawn,
Or a glimpse of beckoning hands
Gleams and fades above the sands.

IV

Day, that mixed my soul with men,
Has it died forever, then?
Is there any world but this?
If the god deny his bliss,
And the goddess cannot give,
What are gods, that men should live?
Lo! the sand beneath my feet
Hoards the bounty of its heat,
And thy silver cheeks I see
Bright with him who burns for thee.
Give the airy semblance form,
Bid the dream be near and warm;
Or, if dreams but flash and die
As a mock to heart and eye,
Then descend thyself, and be,
Ishtar, sacred bride to me!

1876.

MY PROLOGUE

I

IF heat of youth, 't is heat suppressed
That fills my breast:
The childhood of a voiceless lyre
Preserves my fire.
I chanted not while I was young;
But ere age chill, I liberate my tongue!

II

Apart from stormy ways of men,
Maine's loneliest glen
Held me as banished, and unheard
I saved my word:
I would not know the bitter taste
Of the crude fame which falls to them that haste.

III

On each impatient year I tossed
A holocaust
Of effort, ashes ere it burned,
And justly spurned.
If now I own maturer days,
I know not: dust to me is passing praise.

IV

But out of life arises song,
Clear, vital, strong, —

The speech men pray for when they pine,
The speech divine
No other can interpret: grand
And permanent as time and race and land.

V

I dreamed I spake it: do I dream,
In pride supreme,
Or, like late lovers, found the bride
Their youth denied,
Is this my stinted passion's flow?
It well may be; and they that read will know.

1874.

GABRIEL

I

Once let the Angel blow!—
A peal from the parted heaven,
The first of seven!
For the time is come that was foretold
So long ago!
As the avalanche gathers, huge and cold,
From the down of the harmless snow,
The years and the ages gather and hang
Till the day when the word is spoken:
When they that dwell in the end of time
Are smitten alike for the early crime
As the vials of wrath are broken!

II

Yea, the time hath come;
Though Earth is rich, her children are dumb!
Ye cry: Beware
Of the dancer's floating hair,
And the cymbal's clash, and the sound of pipe and drum!
But the Prophet cries: Beware
Of the hymn unheard, the unanswered prayer;
For ignorance is past,
And knowledge comes at last,
And the burden it brings to you how can ye bear?

III

Again let the Angel blow!
The seals are loosened that seemed to bind
The Future's bliss and woe!
For a shrinking soul, an uncertain mind,
For eyes that see, but are growing blind,
Your landmarks fade and change:
The colors to-day you borrow
Take another hue to-morrow;
The forms of your faith are wild and strange!
Walking, you stagger to and fro:
So, let the Angel blow!

IV

Ah, shall the Angel blow?
Something must have remained,
Something fresh and unstained,
Sprung from the common soil where the virtues grow:
Nay, it is not so!
Art succumbs to the coarser sense,
Greed o'ercometh sweet abstinence;
Of vices young men talk,
In scarlet your women walk,
And the soul of honor that made you proud,
The loftier grace your lives avowed,
Are a passive corpse and a tattered shroud:
What you forget, can your children know?
So, let the Angel blow!

V

Yes, let the Angel blow!
A peal from the parted heaven,
The first of seven;—
The warning, not yet the sign, of woe!
That men arise
And look about them with wakened eyes,
Behold on their garments the dust and slime,
Refrain, forbear,
Accept the weight of a nobler care
And take reproach from the fallen time!

1874.

THE LOST CARYATID

When over Salamis stands Homer's moon,
And from the wasted wave

Of spent Ilissus falls no liquid croon,
But tears that wet a grave;
When on Pentelicus the quarried scars
Are dusk as dying stars;

When Attica's gray olives blend and gleam
Like sea-mists o'er the plain;
And, islanded in Time's eternal stream,
Only Athenè's fane
Shines forth, when every light of heaven must kiss
Art's one Acropolis:

Then, unto him — the modern Hellenes say —
In whom old dreams survive;
For whom the force of each immortal day
Earth knew, is yet alive —
To him who waits and listens there alone,
Rises a strange, sweet moan.

The voice of broken marble, the complaint
Of beauty nigh despair,
In the thick wilderness of years grown faint
For lack of rite and prayer,
Since all perfection, making her sublime,
Provoked her evil time.

It floats around the Panathenaic frieze
Till every triglyph sings,
While up from Dionysian chairs the breeze
A murmurous answer brings;
But most it gathers voice, and rests upon
The spoiled Erechtheion.

There the white architrave that fronts the east
Lightly five sisters hold
As blossom-baskets at a bridal feast,
Or jars of Samian gold:
Each proud and pure, and still a glorious wraith
Of Beauty wed to Faith!

The sixth has vanished, from the service torn,
Long since, by savage hands,
And keeps dumb vigil where the misty morn
Creeps o'er Cimmerian lands;
While they, in pallid lip and dew-damp cheek
Lament, and seem to speak:

"Where art thou, sister? Thee, the sparkling day,
The moonbeam finds no more,
Save in some hall where darker gods decay
On some barbarian shore!
Ah, where, beyond Poseidon's bitter foam,
Hear'st thou the voice of home?

"Where, when, as now, the night's mysterious hush
Our ancient life renews,
Or when the tops of Corydallus flush
O'er the departing dews —
And lovely Attica, in silver spread,
Forgets that she is dead —

"Bidest thou in exile? Speak! Our being cold, —
Thou knowest! — yet retains
The thrill of choric strophes, flutes of gold,
And all victorious strains.
Dark is the world that knows not us divine;
But, ah! what fate is thine?"

Lo! from afar, across unmeasured seas
An answering sound is blown,
As when some wind-god's ghost moves Thessaly's
Tall pines to solemn tone;
Yet happy, as a sole Arcadian flute,
When harvest-fields are mute.

"I hear ye, sisters!" — thus the answer falls:
"My marble sends reply
To you, who guard the fair, immortal halls
Beneath our ancient sky;
Yet give no sadder echo to your moan, —
I am not here alone!

"Dark walls surround me; that keen azure fire
Of day and night is fled;

Yet worship clothes me, and the old desire
That round your feet is dead:
I see glad eyes, I feel fresh spirits burn,
And beauteous faith return!

"What idle hand or scornful set me here
I heed no longer now;
Men know my loveliness, and, half in fear,
Touch mine insulted brow:
In me the glory of the gods discrowned
The race again has found.

"Move proudly, sisters, bear your architrave
Without me, whom ye miss!
Truth finds her second birthplace, not her grave,
On our Acropolis!
And children here, while there but aliens roam,
Shall build once more our home."

1877.

THE VILLAGE STORK

The old Hercynian Forest sent
His weather on the plain;
Wahlwinkel's orchards writhed and bent
In whirls of wind and rain.
Within her nest, upon the roof,
For generations tempest-proof,
Wahlwinkel's stork with her young ones lay,
When the hand of the hurricane tore away
The house and the home that held them.

The storm passed by; the happy trees
Stood up, and kissed the sun;
And from the birds new melodies
Came fluting one by one.
The stork, upon the paths below,
Went sadly pacing to and fro,
With dripping plumes and head depressed,
For she thought of the spoiled ancestral nest,
And the old, inherited honor.

"Behold her now!" the throstle sang
From out the linden tree;
"Who knows from what a line she sprang,
Beyond the unknown sea?"
"If she could sing, perchance her tale
Might move us," chirruped the nightingale.
"Sing? She can only rattle and creak!"
Whistled the bullfinch, with silver beak,
Within the wires of his prison.

And all birds there, or loud or low,
Were one in scoff and scorn;
But still the stork paced to and fro,
As utterly forlorn.
Then suddenly, in turn of eye,
She saw a poet passing by,
And the thought in his brain was an arrow of fire,
That pierced her with passion, and pride, and ire,
And gave her a voice to answer.

She raised her head and shook her wings,
And faced the piping crowd.
"Best service," said she, "never sings,
True honor is not loud.
My kindred carol not, nor boast;
Yet we are loved and welcomed most,
And our ancient race is dearest and first,
And the hand that hurts us is held accursed
In every home of Wahlwinkel!

"Beneath a sky forever fair,
And with a summer sod,
The land I come from smiles — and there
My brother was a god!
My nest upon a temple stands
And sees the shine of desert lands;
And the palm and the tamarisk cool my wings,
When the blazing beam of the noonday stings,
And I drink from the holy river!

"There I am sacred, even as here;
Yet dare I not be lost,

When meads are bright, hearts full of cheer,
At blithesome Pentecost.
Then from mine obelisk I depart,
Guided by something in my heart,
And sweep in a line over Libyan sands
To the blossoming olives of Grecian lands,
And rest on the Cretan Ida!

"Parnassus sees me as I sail;
I cross the Adrian brine;
The distant summits fade and fail,
Dalmatian, Apennine;
The Alpine snows beneath me gleam,
I see the yellow Danube stream;
But I hasten on till my spent wings fall
Where I bring a blessing to each and all,
And babes to the wives of Wahlwinkel!"

She drooped her head and spake no more;
The birds on either hand
Sang louder, lustier than before —
They could not understand.
Thus mused the stork, with snap of beak:
"Better be silent, than so speak!
Highest being can never be taught:
They have their voices, I my thought;
And they were never in Egypt!"

August, 1878.

ODES

ODES

1869–1878

GETTYSBURG ODE

DEDICATION OF THE NATIONAL MONUMENT, JULY 1, 1869

I

After the eyes that looked, the lips that spake
Here, from the shadows of impending death,
Those words of solemn breath,
What voice may fitly break
The silence, doubly hallowed, left by him?
We can but bow the head, with eyes grown dim,
And, as a Nation's litany, repeat
The phrase his martyrdom hath made complete,
Noble as then, but now more sadly-sweet:
"Let us, the Living, rather dedicate
Ourselves to the unfinished work, which they
Thus far advanced so nobly on its way,
And save the perilled State!
Let us, upon this field where they, the brave,
Their last full measure of devotion gave,
Highly resolve they have not died in vain!—
That, under God, the Nation's later birth
Of Freedom, and the people's gain
Of their own Sovereignty, shall never wane
And perish from the circle of the earth!"
From such a perfect text, shall Song aspire
To light her faded fire,
And into wandering music turn
Its virtue, simple, sorrowful, and stern?
His voice all elegies anticipated;
For, whatsoe'er the strain,
We hear that one refrain:
"We consecrate ourselves to them, the Consecrated!"

II

After the thunder-storm our heaven is blue:
Far-off, along the borders of the sky,
In silver folds the clouds of battle lie,
With soft, consoling sunlight shining through;
And round the sweeping circle of your hills
The crashing cannon-thrills
Have faded from the memory of the air;

And Summer pours from unexhausted fountains
Her bliss on yonder mountains:
The camps are tenantless, the breastworks bare:
Earth keeps no stain where hero-blood was poured:
The hornets, humming on their wings of lead,
Have ceased to sting, their angry swarms are dead,
And, harmless in its scabbard, rusts the sword!

III

O, not till now, — O, now we dare, at last,
To give our heroes fitting consecration!
Not till the soreness of the strife is past,
And Peace hath comforted the weary Nation!
So long her sad, indignant spirit held
One keen regret, one throb of pain, unquelled;
So long the land about her feet was waste,
The ashes of the burning lay upon her,
We stood beside their graves with brows abased,
Waiting the purer mood to do them honor!
They, through the flames of this dread holocaust,
The patriot's wrath, the soldier's ardor, lost:
They sit above us and above our passion,
Disparaged even by our human tears, —
Beholding truth our race, perchance, may fashion
In the slow process of the creeping years.
We saw the still reproof upon their faces;
We heard them whisper from the shining spaces:
"To-day ye grieve: come not to us with sorrow!
Wait for the glad, the reconciled To-morrow!
Your grief but clouds the ether where we dwell;
Your anger keeps your souls and ours apart:
But come with peace and pardon, all is well!
And come with love, we touch you, heart to heart!"

IV

Immortal Brothers, we have heard!
Our lips declare the reconciling word:
For Battle taught, that set us face to face,
The stubborn temper of the race,
And both, from fields no longer alien, come,
To grander action equally invited, —
Marshalled by Learning's trump, by Labor's drum,
In strife that purifies and makes united!
We force to build, the powers that would destroy;
The muscles, hardened by the sabre's grasp,
Now give our hands a firmer clasp:
We bring not grief to you, but solemn joy!
And, feeling you so near,
Look forward with your eyes, divinely clear,
To some sublimely-perfect, sacred year,
When sons of fathers whom ye overcame
Forget in mutual pride the partial blame,
And join with us, to set the final crown
Upon your dear renown, —
The People's Union in heart and name!

V

And yet, ye Dead! — and yet
Our clouded natures cling to one regret:
We are not all resigned
To yield, with even mind,
Our scarcely-risen stars, that here untimely set.
We needs must think of History that waits
For lines that live but in their proud beginning, —
Arrested promises and cheated fates, —
Youth's boundless venture and its single winning!
We see the ghosts of deeds they might have done,
The phantom homes that beaconed their endeavor;
The seeds of countless lives, in them begun,
That might have multiplied for us forever!
We grudge the better strain of men
That proved itself, and was extinguished then —
The field, with strength and hope so thickly sown,
Wherefrom no other harvest shall be mown:
For all the land, within its clasping seas,
Is poorer now in bravery and beauty,
Such wealth of manly loves and energies
Was given to teach us all the freeman's sacred duty!

VI

Again 't is they, the Dead,
By whom our hearts are comforted.
Deep as the land-blown murmurs of the waves
The answer cometh from a thousand graves:
"Not so! we are not orphaned of our fate!
Though life were warmest, and though love were sweetest,
We still have portion in their best estate:
Our fortune is the fairest and completest!
Our homes are everywhere: our loves are set
In hearts of man and woman, sweet and vernal:
Courage and Truth, the children we beget,
Unmixed of baser earth, shall be eternal.
A finer spirit in the blood shall give
The token of the lines wherein we live, —
Unselfish force, unconscious nobleness
That in the shocks of fortune stands unshaken, —
The hopes that in their very being bless,
The aspirations that to deeds awaken!
If aught of finer virtue ye allow
To us, that faith alone its like shall win you;
So, trust like ours shall ever lift the brow;
And strength like ours shall ever steel the sinew!
We are the blossoms which the storm has cast
From the Spring promise of our Freedom's tree,
Pruning its overgrowths, that so, at last,
Its later fruit more bountiful shall be! —
Content, if, when the balm of Time assuages
The branch's hurt, some fragrance of our lives
In all the land survives,
And makes their memory sweet through still expanding ages!"

VII

Thus grandly, they we mourn, themselves console us;
And, as their spirits conquer and control us,
We hear, from some high realm that lies beyond,
The hero-voices of the Past respond.
From every State that reached a broader right
Through fiery gates of battle; from the shock
Of old invasions on the People's rock;
From tribes that stood, in Kings' and Priests' despite;
From graves, forgotten in the Syrian sand,
Or nameless barrows of the Northern strand,
Or gorges of the Alps and Pyrenees,
Or the dark bowels of devouring seas, —
Wherever Man for Man's sake died, — wherever
Death stayed the march of upward-climbing feet,
Leaving their Present incomplete,
But through far Futures crowning their endeavor, —
Their ghostly voices to our ears are sent,
As when the high note of a trumpet wrings
Æolian answers from the strings
Of many a mute, unfingered instrument!
Platæan cymbals thrill for us to-day;
The horns of Sempach in our echoes play,
And nearer yet, and sharper, and more stern,
The slogan rings that startled Bannockburn;
Till from the field, made green with kindred deed,
The shields are clashed in exultation
Above the dauntless Nation,
That for a Continent has fought its Runnymede!

VIII

Aye, for a Continent! The heart that beats
With such rich blood of sacrifice
Shall, from the Tropics, drowsed with languid heats,
To the blue ramparts of the Northern ice,
Make felt its pulses, all this young world over! —
Shall thrill, and shake, and sway
Each land that bourgeons in the Western day,
Whatever flag may float, whatever shield may cover!
With fuller manhood every wind is rife,
In every soil are sown the seeds of valor,
Since out of death came forth such boundless life,
Such ruddy beauty out of anguished pallor!
And that first deed, along the Southern wave,
Spoiled not the sister-land, but lent an arm to save!

IX

Now, in her seat secure,
Where distant menaces no more can reach her,
Our land, in undivided freedom pure,
Becomes the unwilling world's unconscious teacher;
And, day by day, beneath serener skies,
The unshaken pillars of her palace rise, —
The Doric shafts, that lightly upward press,
And hide in grace their giant massiveness.

What though the sword has hewn each corner-stone,
And precious blood cements the deep foundation!
Never by other force have empires grown;
From other basis never rose a nation!
For strength is born of struggle, faith of doubt,
Of discord law, and freedom of oppression:
We hail from Pisgah, with exulting shout,
The Promised Land below us, bright with sun,
And deem its pastures won,
Ere toil and blood have earned us their possession!
Each aspiration of our human earth
Becomes an act through keenest pangs of birth;
Each force, to bless, must cease to be a dream,
And conquer life through agony supreme;
Each inborn right must outwardly be tested
By stern material weapons, ere it stand
In the enduring fabric of the land,
Secured for these who yielded it, and those who wrested!

X

This they have done for us who slumber here, —
Awake, alive, though now so dumbly sleeping;
Spreading the board, but tasting not its cheer,
Sowing, but never reaping; —
Building, but never sitting in the shade
Of the strong mansion they have made; —
Speaking their word of life with mighty tongue,
But hearing not the echo, million-voiced,
Of brothers who rejoiced,
From all our river vales and mountains flung!
So take them, Heroes of the songful Past!
Open your ranks, let every shining troop
Its phantom banners droop,
To hail Earth's noblest martyrs, and her last!
Take them, O Fatherland!
Who, dying, conquered in thy name;
And, with a grateful hand,
Inscribe their deed who took away thy blame, —
Give, for their grandest all, thine insufficient fame!
Take them, O God! our Brave,
The glad fulfillers of Thy dread decree;
Who grasped the sword for Peace, and smote to save,
And, dying here for Freedom, also died for Thee!

SHAKESPEARE'S STATUE

CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK, MAY 23, 1872

I

In this free Pantheon of the air and sun,
Where stubborn granite grudgingly gives place
To petted turf, the garden's daintier race
Of flowers, and Art hath slowly won

A smile from grim, primeval barrenness,
What alien Form doth stand ?
Where scarcely yet the heroes of the land,
As in their future's haven, from the stress
Of all conflicting tides, find quiet deep
Of bronze or marble sleep,
What stranger comes, to join the scanty band ?
Who pauses here, as one that muses
While centuries of men go by,
And unto all our questioning refuses
His clear, infallible reply ?
Who hath his will of us, beneath our new-world sky ?

II

Here, in his right, he stands!
No breadth of earth-dividing seas can bar
The breeze of morning, or the morning star,
From visiting our lands:
His wit, the breeze, his wisdom, as the star,
Shone where our earliest life was set, and blew
To freshen hope and plan
In brains American, —
To urge, resist, encourage, and subdue!
He came, a household ghost we could not ban:
He sat, on winter nights, by cabin fires;
His summer fairies linked their hands
Along our yellow sands;
He preached within the shadow of our spires;
And when the certain Fate drew nigh, to cleave
The birth-cord, and a separate being leave,
He, in our ranks of patient-hearted men,
Wrought with the boundless forces of his fame,
Victorious, and became
The Master of our thought, the land's first Citizen!

III

If, here, his image seem
Of softer scenes and grayer skies to dream,
Thatched cot and rustic tavern, ivied hall,
The cuckoo's April call
And cowslip-meads beside the Avon stream,
He shall not fail that other home to find
We could not leave behind!
The forms of Passion, which his fancy drew,
In us their ancient likenesses beget:
So, from our lives forever born anew,
He stands amid his own creations yet!
Here comes lean Cassius, of conventions tired;
Here, in his coach, luxurious Antony
Beside his Egypt, still of men admired;
And Brutus plans some purer liberty!
A thousand Shylocks, Jew and Christian, pass;
A hundred Hamlets, by their times betrayed;
And sweet Anne Page comes tripping o'er the grass,
And antlered Falstaff pants beneath the shade.

Here toss upon the wanton summer wind
The locks of Rosalind;
Here some gay glove the damnèd spot conceals
Which Lady Macbeth feels:
His ease here smiling smooth Iago takes,
And outcast Lear gives passage to his woe,
And here some foiled Reformer sadly breaks
His wand of Prospero!
In liveried splendor, side by side,
Nick Bottom and Titania ride;
And Portia, flushed with cheers of men,
Disdains dear, faithful Imogen;
And Puck, beside the form of Morse,
Stops on his forty-minute course;
And Ariel from his swinging bough
A blossom casts on Bryant's brow,
Until, as summoned from his brooding brain,
He sees his children all again,
In us, as on our lips, each fresh, immortal strain!

IV

Be welcome, Master! In our active air
Keep the calm strength we need to learn of thee!
A steadfast anchor be
'Mid passions that exhaust, and times that wear!
Thy kindred race, that scarcely knows
What power is in Repose,
What permanence in Patience, what renown
In silent faith and plodding toil of Art
That shyly works apart,
All these in thee unconsciously doth crown!

V

The Many grow, through honor to the One;
And what of loftier life we do not live,
This Form shall help to give,
In our free Pantheon of the air and sun!
Here, where the noise of Trade is loudest,
It builds a shrine august,
To show, while pomp of wealth is proudest,
How brief is gilded dust:
How Art succeeds, though long,
And o'er the tumult of the generations,
The strong, enduring spirit of the nations,
How speaks the voice of Song!
Our City, at her gateways of the sea,
Twines bay around the mural crown upon her,
And wins new grace and dearer dignity,
Giving our race's Poet honor!
If such as he
Again may ever be,
And our humanity another crown
Find in some equal, late renown,
The reverence of what he was shall call it down!

GOETHE

NEW YORK, AUGUST 28, 1875

I

Whose voice shall so invade the spheres
That, ere it die, the Master hears?
Whose arm is now so strong
To fling the votive garland of a song,
That some fresh odor of a world he knew
With large enjoyment, and may yet
Not utterly forget,
Shall reach his place, and whisper whence it grew?
Dare we invoke him, that he pause
On trails divine of unimagined laws,
And bend the luminous eyes
Experience could not dim, nor Fate surprise,
On these late honors, where we fondly seem,
Him thus exalting, like him to aspire,
And reach, in our desire,
The triumph of his toil, the beauty of his dream!

II

God moulds no second poet from the clay
Time once hath cut in marble: when, at last,
The veil is plucked away,
We see no face familiar to the Past.
New mixtures of the elements,
And fresh espousals of the soul and sense,
At first disguise
The unconjectured Genius to our eyes,
Till self-nursed faith and self-encouraged power
Win the despotic hour
That bids our doubting race accept and recognize!

III

Ah, who shall say what cloud of disregard,
Cast by the savage ancient fame
Of some forgotten name,
Mantled the Chian bard?
He walked beside the strong, prophetic sea,
Indifferent as itself, and nobly free;
While roll of waves and rhythmic sound of oars
Along Ionian shores,
To Troy's high story chimed in undertone,
And gave his song the accent of their own!
What classic ghost severe was summoned up
To threaten Dante, when the bitter bread
Of exile on his board was spread,
The bitter wine of bounty filled his cup?
We need not ask: the unpropitious years,
The hate of Guelf, the lordly sneers
Of Della Scala's court, the Roman ban,
Were but as eddying dust
To his firm-centred trust;
For through that air without a star

Burned one unwavering beacon from afar,
That kept him his and ours, the stern, immortal man!
What courtier, stuffed with smooth, accepted lore
Of Song's patrician line,
But shrugged his velvet shoulders all the more,
And heard, with bland, indulgent face,
As who bestows a grace,
The homely phrase that Shakespeare made divine?
So, now, the dainty souls that crave
Light stepping-stones across a shallow wave,
Shrink from the deeps of Goethe's soundless song!
So, now, the weak, imperfect fire
That knows but half of passion and desire
Betrays itself, to do the Master wrong; —
Turns, dazzled by his white, uncolored glow,
And deems his sevenfold heat the wintry flash of snow!

IV

Fate, like a grudging child,
Herself once reconciled
To power by loss, by suffering to fame;
Weighing the Poet's name
With blindness, exile, want, and aims denied;
Or let faint spirits perish in their pride;
Or gave her justice when its need had died;
But as if weary she
Of struggle crowned by victory,
Him with the largesse of her gifts she tried!
Proud beauty to the boy she gave:
A lip that bubbled song, yet lured the bee;
An eye of light, a forehead pure and free;
Strength as of streams, and grace as of the wave!
Round him the morning air
Of life she charmed, and made his pathway fair;
Lent Love her lightest chain,
That laid no bondage on the haughty brain,
And cheapened honors with a new disdain:
Kept, through the shocks of Time;
For him the haven of a peace sublime,
And let his sight forerun
The sown achievement, to the harvest won!

V

But Fortune's darling stood unspoiled:
Caressing Love and Pleasure,
He let not go the imperishable treasure:
He thought, and sported; carolled free, and toiled:
He stretched wide arms to clasp the joy of Earth,
But delved in every field
Of knowledge, conquering all clear worth
Of action, that ennobles through the sense
Of wholly used intelligence:
From loftiest pinnacles, that shone revealed
In pure poetic ether, he could bend
To win the little store
Of humblest Labor's lore,

And give each face of Life the greeting of a friend!
He taught, and governed, — knew the thankless days
Of service and dispraise;
He followed Science on her stony ways;
He turned from princely state to heed
The single nature's need,
And, through the chill of hostile years,
Never unlearned the noble shame of tears!
Faced by fulfilled Ideals, he aspired
To win the perished secret of their grace, —
To dower the earnest children of a race
Toil never tamed, nor acquisition tired,
With Freedom born of Beauty! — and for them
His Titan soul combined
The passions of the mind,
Which blood and time so long had held apart,
Till the white blossom of the Grecian Art
The world saw shine once more, upon a Gothic stem!

VI

His measure would we mete?
It is a sea that murmurs at our feet.
Wait, first, upon the strand:
A far shore glimmers — "knowest thou the land?"
Whence these gay flowers that breathe beside the water?
Ask thou the Erl-King's daughter!
It is no cloud that darkens thus the shore:
Faust on his mantle passes o'er.
The water roars, the water heaves,
The trembling waves divide:
A shape of beauty, rising, cleaves
The green translucent tide.
The shape is a charm, the voice is a spell;
We yield, and dip in the gentle swell.
Then billowy arms our limbs entwine,
And, chill as the hidden heat of wine,
We meet the shock of the sturdy brine;
And we feel, beneath the surface-flow,
The tug of the powerful undertow,
That ceaselessly gathers and sweeps
To broader surges and darker deeps;
Till, faint and breathless, we can but float
Idly, and listen to many a note
From horns of the Tritons flung afar;
And see, on the watery rim,
The circling Dorides swim,
And Cypris, poised on her dove-drawn car!
Torn from the deepest caves,
Sea-blooms brighten the waves:
The breaker throws pearls on the sand,
And inlets pierce to the heart of the land,
Winding by dorf and mill,
Where the shores are green and the waters still,
And the force, but now so wild,
Mirrors the maiden and sports with the child!
Spent from the sea, we gain its brink,
With soul aroused and limbs aflame:

Half are we drawn, and half we sink
[illegible]

VII

O meadows threaded by the silver Main!
[illegible]
Which haunted Hafiz, and thou,
[illegible]
Ye know your poet, and not only ye
The purple Tyrrhene Sea
Not murmure Virgil less, but him the more;
The Lar of haughty Rome
Gave the high guest a home
He dwells with Tasso on Sorrento's shore!
The dowy wild rose of his German lays,
[illegible]
In many a Sabine glen,
[illegible]
But pass the hoary ridge of Lebanon
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
And [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
He [illegible]

VIII

[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
Through narrow ways, that do your beings wrong,
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
And that sublimest joy forego,
To seek, aspire, and know!
Behold in him, since our strong line began,
The first full-statured man!
Dear is the Minstrel, even to hearts of prose;
But he who sets all aspiration free
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

THE NATIONAL ODE

INDEPENDENCE SQUARE, PHILADELPHIA, JULY 4, 1876

I. — 1.

Sun of the stately Day
Let Asia into the shadow drift,
Let Europe bask in thy ripened ray,
And over the severing ocean lift
A brow of broader splendor!
Give light to the eager eyes
Of the Land that waits to behold thee rise;
The gladness of morning lend her,
With the triumph of noon attend her,
And the peace of the vesper skies!
For, lo! she cometh now
With hope on the lip and pride on the brow,
Stronger, and dearer, and fairer,
To smile on the love we bear her, —
To live, as we dreamed her and sought her,
Liberty's latest daughter!
In the clefts of the rocks, in the secret places,
We found her traces;
On the hills, in the crash of woods that fall,
We heard her call;
When the lines of battle broke,
We saw her face in the fiery smoke;
Through toil, and anguish, and desolation,
We followed, and found her
With the grace of a virgin Nation
As a sacred zone around her!
Who shall rejoice
With a righteous voice,
Far-heard through the ages, if not she?
For the menace is dumb that defied her,
The doubt is dead that denied her,
And she stands acknowledged, and strong, and free!

II. — 1.

Ah, hark! the solemn undertone,
On every wind of human story blown.
A large, divinely-moulded Fate
Questions the right and purpose of a State,
And in its plan sublime
Our eras are the dust of Time.
The far-off Yesterday of power
Creeps back with stealthy feet,
Invades the lordship of the hour,
And at our banquet takes the unbidden seat.
From all unchronicled and silent ages
Before the Future first begot the Past,
Till History dared, at last,
To write eternal words on granite pages;
From Egypt's tawny drift, and Assur's mound,
And where, uplifted white and far,
Earth highest yearns to meet a star,

And Man his manhood by the Ganges found, —
Imperial heads, of old millennial sway,
And still by some pale splendor crowned,
Chill as a corpse-light in our full-orbed day,
In ghostly grandeur rise
And say, through stony lips and vacant eyes:
"Thou that assertest freedom, power, and fame,
Declare to us thy claim!"

I. — 2.

On the shores of a Continent cast,
She won the inviolate soil
By loss of heirdom of all the Past,
And faith in the royal right of Toil!
She planted homes on the savage sod:
Into the wilderness lone
She walked with fearless feet,
In her hand the divining-rod,
Till the veins of the mountains beat
With fire of metal and force of stone!
She set the speed of the river-head
To turn the mills of her bread;
She drove her ploughshare deep
Through the prairie's thousand-centuried sleep,
To the South, and West, and North,
She called Pathfinder forth,
Her faithful and sole companion
Where the flushed Sierra, snow-starred,
Her way to the sunset barred,
And the nameless rivers in thunder and foam
Channelled the terrible canyon!
Nor paused, till her uttermost home
Was built, in the smile of a softer sky
And the glory of beauty still to be,
Where the haunted waves of Asia die
On the strand of the world-wide sea!

II. — 2.

The race, in conquering,
Some fierce, Titanic joy of conquest knows;
Whether in veins of serf or king,
Our ancient blood beats restless in repose.
Challenge of Nature unsubdued
Awaits not Man's defiant answer long;
For hardship, even as wrong,
Provokes the level-eyed heroic mood.
This for herself she did; but that which lies,
As over earth the skies,
Blending all forms in one benignant glow, —
Crowned conscience, tender care,
Justice that answers every bondman's prayer,
Freedom where Faith may lead and Thought may dare,
The power of minds that know,
Passion of hearts that feel,

Purchased by blood and woe,
Guarded by fire and steel, —
Hath she secured? What blazon on her shield,
In the clear Century's light
Shines to the world revealed,
Declaring nobler triumph, born of Right?

I. — 3.

Foreseen in the vision of sages,
Foretold when martyrs bled,
She was born of the longing of ages,
By the truth of the noble dead
And the faith of the living fed!
No blood in her lightest veins
Frets at remembered chains,
Nor shame of bondage has bowed her head.
In her form and features still
The unblenching Puritan will,
Cavalier honor, Huguenot grace,
The Quaker truth and sweetness,
And the strength of the danger-girdled race
Of Holland, blend in a proud completeness.
From the homes of all, where her being began,
She took what she gave to Man;
Justice, that knew no station,
Belief, as soul decreed,
Free air for aspiration,
Free force for independent deed!
She takes, but to give again,
As the sea returns the rivers in rain;
And gathers the chosen of her seed
From the hunted of every crown and creed.
Her Germany dwells by a gentler Rhine;
Her Ireland sees the old sunburst shine;
Her France pursues some dream divine;
Her Norway keeps his mountain pine;
Her Italy waits by the western brine;
And, broad-based under all,
Is planted England's oaken-hearted mood,
As rich in fortitude
As e'er went worldward from the island-wall!
Fused in her candid light,
To one strong race all races here unite:
Tongues melt in hers, hereditary foemen
Forget their sword and slogan, kith and clan:
'T was glory, once, to be a Roman:
She makes it glory, now, to be a man!

II. — 3.

Bow down!
Doff thine æonian crown!
One hour forget
The glory, and recall the debt:

Make expiation,
Of humbler mood,
For the pride of thine exultation
O'er peril conquered and strife subdued!
But half the right is wrested
When victory yields her prize.
And half the marrow tested
When old endurance dies.
In the sight of them that love thee,
Bow to the Greater above thee!
He faileth not to smite
The idle ownership of Right,
Nor spares to sinews fresh from trial,
And virtue schooled in long denial,
The tests that wait for thee
In larger perils of prosperity.
Here, at the Century's awful shrine,
Bow to thy Father's God, and thine!

I. — 4.

Behold! she bendeth now,
Humbling the chaplet of her hundred years:
There is a solemn sweetness on her brow,
And in her eyes are sacred tears.
Can she forget,
In present joy, the burden of her debt,
When for a captive race
She grandly staked, and won,
The total promise of her power begun,
And bared her bosom's grace
To the sharp wound that inly tortures yet?
Can she forget
The million graves her young devotion set,
The hands that clasp above,
From either side, in sad, returning love?
Can she forget,
Here, where the Ruler of to-day,
The Citizen of to-morrow,
And equal thousands to rejoice and pray
Beside these holy walls are met,
Her birth-cry, mixed of keenest bliss and sorrow?
Where, on July's immortal morn
Held forth, the People saw her head
And shouted to the world: "The King is dead,
But, lo! the Heir is born!"
When fire of Youth, and sober trust of Age,
In Farmer, Soldier, Priest, and Sage,
Arose and cast upon her
Baptismal garments, — never robes so fair
Clad prince in Old-World air, —
Their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor!

II. — 4.

Arise! Recrown thy head,
Radiant with blessing of the Dead!
Bear from this hallowed place
The prayer that purifies thy lips,
The light of courage that defies eclipse,
The rose of Man's new morning on thy face!
Let no iconoclast
Invade thy rising Pantheon of the Past,
To make a blank where Adams stood,
To touch the Father's sheathed and sacred blade,
Spoil crowns on Jefferson and Franklin laid,
Or wash from Freedom's feet the stain of Lincoln's blood!
Hearken, as from that haunted Hall
Their voices call:
"We lived and died for thee;
We greatly dared that thou might'st be:
So, from thy children still
We claim denials which at last fulfil,
And freedom yielded to preserve thee free!
Beside clear-hearted Right
That smiles at Power's uplifted rod,
Plant Duties that requite,
And Order that sustains, upon thy sod,
And stand in stainless might
Above all self, and only less than God!

III. — 1.

Here may thy solemn challenge end,
All-proving Past, and each discordance die
Of doubtful augury,
Or in one choral with the Present blend,
And that half-heard, sweet harmony
Of something nobler that our sons may see!
Though poignant memories burn
Of days that were, and may again return,
When thy fleet foot, O Huntress of the Woods,
The slippery brinks of danger knew,
And dim the eyesight grew
That was so sure in thine old solitudes, —
Yet stays some richer sense
Won from the mixture of thine elements,
To guide the vagrant scheme,
And winnow truth from each conflicting dream!
Yet in thy blood shall live
Some force unspent, some essence primitive,
To seize the highest use of things;
For Fate, to mould thee to her plan,
Denied thee food of kings,
Withheld the udder and the orchard-fruits,
Fed thee with savage roots,
And forced thy harsher milk from barren breasts of man!

III. — 2.

O sacred Woman-Form,
Of the first People's need and passion wrought, —
No thin, pale ghost of Thought,
But fair as Morning and as heart's-blood warm, —
Wearing thy priestly tiar on Judah's hills;
Clear-eyed beneath Athene's helm of gold;
Or from Rome's central seat
Hearing the pulses of the Continents beat
In thunder where her legions rolled;
Compact of high heroic hearts and wills,
Whose being circles all
The selfless aims of men, and all fulfils;
Thyself not free, so long as one is thrall;
Goddess, that as a Nation lives,
And as a Nation dies,
That for her children as a man defies,
And to her children as a mother gives, —
Take our fresh fealty now!
No more a Chieftainess, with wampum-zone
And feather-cinctured brow, —
No more a new Britannia, grown
To spread an equal banner to the breeze,
And lift thy trident o'er the double seas;
But with unborrowed crest,
In thine own native beauty dressed, —
The front of pure command, the unflinching eye, thine own!

III. — 3.

Look up, look forth, and on!
There 's light in the dawning sky:
The clouds are parting, the night is gone:
Prepare for the work of the day!
Fallow thy pastures lie,
And far thy shepherds stray,
And the fields of thy vast domain
Are waiting for purer seed
Of knowledge, desire, and deed,
For keener sunshine and mellower rain!
But keep thy garments pure:
Pluck them back, with the old disdain,
From touch of the hands that stain!
So shall thy strength endure.
Transmute into good the gold of Gain,
Compel to beauty thy ruder powers,
Till the bounty of coming hours
Shall plant, on thy fields apart,
With the oak of Toil, the rose of Art!
Be watchful, and keep us so:
Be strong, and fear no foe:
Be just, and the world shall know!
With the same love love us, as we give;
And the day shall never come,
That finds us weak or dumb

To join and smite and cry
In the great task, for thee to die,
And the greater task, for thee to live!

THE OBSEQUIES IN ROME

JANUARY 17, 1878

I

Victor Emanuel! — of prophetic name,
Who, crowned in sore defeat,
Caught out of blood, disaster, and retreat,
With wounded hands, a soldier's simple fame, —
Content, had that been all,
And most content, victoriously to fall: —
Life saved thee for a people's holiest aim,
And leaves thee Victor, in thy pall!
"God with us" may that people say,
Who walk behind thy conquering dust, to-day:
Yea, all thine Italy
Made one, at last, and proudly free,
Blesses thy sire's baptismal prophecy!

II

Since, over-coarse to be the Empire's lord,
Herulian Odoâker fell
Among spilled goblets, by the Gothic sword,
In old Ravenna's palace citadel;
And, after him, Theodoric strove
To own the land he could not choose but love; —
And both, from no deficiency of power,
But failing heart and brain
That might revivify the beauty slain,
Builded barbaric thrones for one brief hour; —
Since, in a glorious vision cast
By some narcotic opiate of the Past,
Rienzi sought to be
Brutus in deed, Cæsar in victory, —
The Italy, that once was Rome,
Dismembered, sighed for her deliverance,
Saw her Republics die,
Leaned vainly on the broken reed of France,
Till, when despair seemed nigh,
She knew herself, and, starting from her trance,
Summoned the Victor, who hath led her home!

III

He knew his people, and his soul was strong
To wait till they knew him:
The hand that holds a sceptre dare not shake
From the quick blood that burns at every wrong.
With Europe watchful, cold and grim
Behind him, and the triple-hooded snake
Coiled in his path, he went
Through changing gusts of doubt and discontent,
Till all he could have dreamed of, came to him!

But now his people know him! — now,
Since Death's pure coronet is on his brow,
Italian eyes are dim!
Now to her ancient glories sovereign Rome
Adds one more glory: sorrow falls
O'er all the circuit of the Aurelian walls, —
Even from Montorio on Saint Peter's dome:
And where on warm Pamfili-Dorian meads
Fresh dew the daisy feeds;
And breathes in every tall Borghese pine,
And moans on Aventine;
And — could the voice of all desire awake
That once was loud for Italy's dear sake, —
A hymn would burst from each dumb burial-stone
Beside the Cestian pyramid,
Where Keats's, Shelley's dust is hid,
In dithyrambic triumph o'er his own!

IV

Who walk behind his bier?
Behold the solemn phantoms! — who are they,
The stern precursors that arise, to-day,
Breathing of many a fiery year
And clad in drapery of a darker time?
These are the dead who saw,
Too soon, the world's diviner law, —
Too early dreamed their people's dream sublime!
He follows them, who lived to make that dream
A principle supreme,
Dome-browed Mazzini, — he, who planted sure
Its corner-stone, Cavour!
Then, first among the living, that gray chief
Who wears, at last, his Roman laurel's leaf,
To conquer which he rent and shattered down
His rich Sicilian crown.
Ah, bend thee, Garibaldi! — be not loth
To trust the son of him thou gav'st a land,
Or kiss the stainless hand
Of her whose name is pearl and daisy both!
Such love, to-day, thy people give
To him who died, such trust to them who live.

V

Cunning nor Force shall overthrow
The State whose fabric has been builded so.
Under the Pantheon's dome,
The undying Victor still shall reign
O'er one free land that dare not feel a chain, —
Whose mighty heart is Rome!
Still, from the ramparts of the Rhætian snow,
Far down the realms of corn and wine,
Back-boned by Apennine,
To capes that breast the warm Calabrian Sea,
A single race shall know
One love, one right, one loyalty: —
Still from his ashes Italy shall grow,
Who made her Italy!

EPICEDIUM

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

I

Say, who shall mourn him first,
Who sang in days for Song so evil-starred,
Shielding from adverse winds the flame he nursed, —
Our Country's earliest Bard?
For all he sang survives
In stream, and tree, and bird, and mountain-crest,
And consecration of uplifted lives
To Duty's stern behest;
Till, like an echo falling late and far
As unto Earth the answer from a star,
Along his thought's so nigh unnoted track
Our people's heart o'ertakes
His pure design, and hears him, and awakes
To breathe its music back!
Approach, sad Forms, now fitly to employ
The grave, sweet stops of all melodious sound,
Yet undertoned with joy;
For him ye lose, at last is truly found.

II

Scarce darkened by the shadow of these hours,
The Manitou of Flowers,
Crowned with the Painted-cup, that shakes
Its gleam of war-paint on his dusky cheek,
Goes by, but cannot speak;
Yet tear or dew-drop 'neath his coronal breaks,
And in his drooping hand
The azure eyelids of the gentian die
That loves the yellow autumn land ·
The wind-flower, golden-rod,
With phlox and orchis, nod;
And every blossom frail and shy
No careless loiterer sees,
But poet, sun and breeze,
And the bright countenance of our western sky.
They know who loved them; they, if all
Forgot to dress his pall,
Or strew his couch of long repose,
Would from the prairies and the central snows
The sighing west-wind call,
Their withered petals, even as tears, to bear,
And, like a Niobe of air,
Upon his sea-side grave to let them fall!

III

Next you, ye many Streams,
That make a music through his cold green land!
Whether ye scour the granite slides
In broken spray-light or in sheeted gleams,
Or in dark basins stand,
Your bard's fond spirit in your own abides.

William Cullen Bryant

Not yours the wail of woe,
Whose joy is in your wild and wanton flow, —
Chill, beautiful Undines
That flash white hands behind your thicket-screens,
And charm the wildwood and the cloven flumes
To hide you in their glooms!
But he hath kissed you, and his lips betray
Your coyest secrets; now, no more
Your bickering, winking tides shall stray
Through August's idle day,
Or showered with leaves from brown November's floor,
Untamed, and rich in mystery
As ye were wont to be!
From where the dells of Greylock feed
Your thin, young life, to where the Sangamon
Breaks with his winding green the Western mead,
Delay to hasten on!
Ask not the clouds and hills
To swell the veins of your obedient rills,
And brim your banks with turbid overflow;
But calmly, soothly go,
Soft as a sigh and limpid as a tear,
So that ye seem to borrow
The voice and the visage of sorrow,
For he gave you glory and made you dear!

IV

Strong Winds and mighty Mountains, sovereign Sea,
What shall your dirges be?
The slow, great billow, far down the shore,
Booms in its breaking: "Dare — and despair!"
The fetterless winds, as they gather and roar,
Are evermore crying: "Where, oh where?"
The mountain summits, with ages hoar,
Say: "Near and austere, but far and fair!"
Shall ye in your sorrow droop,
Who are strong and sad, and who cannot stoop?
Two may sing to him where he lies,
But the third is hidden behind the skies.
Ye cannot take what he stole,
And made his own in his inmost soul!
The pulse of the endless Wave
Beauty and breadth to his strophes gave;
The Winds with their hands unseen
Held him poised at a height serene;
And the world that wooed him, he smiled to o'ercome it;
Whose being the Mountains made so strong, —
Whose forehead arose like a sunlighted summit
Over eyes that were fountains of thought and song!

V

And last, ye Forms, with shrouded face
Hiding the features of your woe,
That on the fresh sod of his burial-place
Your myrtle, oak, and laurel throw, —
Who are ye? — whence your silent sorrow?

Strange is your aspect, alien your attire:
Shall we, who knew him, borrow
Your unknown speech for Grief's august desire?
Lo! one, with lifted brow
Says: "Nay, he knew and loved me: I am Spain!"
Another: "I am Germany,
Drawn sadly nearer now
By songs of his and mine that make one strain,
Though parted by the world-dividing sea!"
And from the hills of Greece there blew
A wind that shook the olives of Peru,
Till all the world that knew,
Or, knowing not, shall yet awake to know
The sweet humanity that fused his song, —
The haughty challenge unto Wrong,
And for the trampled Truth his fearless blow, —
Acknowledge his exalted mood
Of faith achieved in song-born solitude,
And give him high acclaim
With those who followed Good, and found it Fame!

VI

Ah, no! — why should we mourn
The noble life, that wore its crown of years?
Why drop these tender, unavailing tears
Upon a fate of no fulfilment shorn?
He was too proud to seek
That which should come unasked; and came,
Kindling and brightening as a wind-blown flame
When he had waited long,
And life — but never art — was weak,
But youthful will and sympathy were strong
In white-browed eye and hoary-bearded cheek;
Until, when called at last
That later life to celebrate,
Wherein, dear Italy, for thine estate,
The glorious Present joined the glorious Past,
He fell, and ceased to be!
We could not yield him grandlier than thus,
When, for thy hero speaking, he
Spake equally for us! —
His last word, as his first, was Liberty!
His last word, as his first, for Truth
Struck to the heart of age and youth:
He sought her everywhere,
In the loud city, forest, sea, and air:
He bowed to wisdom other than his own,
To wisdom and to law,
Concealed or dimly shown
In all he knew not, all he knew and saw,
Trusting the Present, tolerant of the Past,
Firm-faithed in what shall come
When the vain noises of these days are dumb;
And his first word was noble as his last!

Berlin, September, 1878.

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